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by

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**A Political and Critical Study on the Factors
That Affect Latino Enrollment and Engagement in
Advanced Placement Courses**

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**A Political and Critical Study on the
Factors That Affect Latino Enrollment and Engagement in
Advanced Placement Courses**

by

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my family, friends, and colleagues that have been such an integral part of this journey. It is true that we are one compilation of many that enter our lives and enrich who we are. You all have inspired, encouraged, and motivated me along the way and have shown me that persistence is a virtue. I am truly blessed.

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A Political and Critical Study on the Factors That Affect Latino Enrollment and Engagement in Advanced Placement Courses

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Advanced placement courses are designed to be innovative and rigorous and also encourage and promote critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. Currently, most high schools across the United States offer advanced placement courses with the intent that students enrolled in such courses will be prepared for entering and completing college courses. While advanced placement courses are intended to promote enriched learning experiences for all students, the enrollment of Latino students in high school advanced placement courses is low as compared to other student groups excluding African American students (College Board, 2010). Despite reports, studies, and literature surrounding equity and access in the advanced placement program, research and literature is limited with respect to identifying factors that influence the enrollment in advanced placement courses in high schools from the perspective of Latino students.

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that influence Latino students in their decision to enroll and participate in advanced placement courses in high schools. Moreover, identifying factors that influence enrollment in advanced placement courses from the perspective of the Latino student was critical to analyzing current practice and informing future strategies for increasing enrollment in high school advanced placement courses.

This qualitative case study provided rich, descriptive data drawn from student experiences and perceptions from individual interviews that allowed for flexibility and opportunities for further exploration of topics or ideas that emerged from the research to best identify the factors that influence enrollment in advanced placement courses.

Significant findings from this study indicate that Latino students do consider AP courses to be critical to a college bound trajectory and would be more likely to consider enrolling in high school AP courses. However, in their decision to not enroll in AP courses, participants cited that information about AP courses and the process for enrolling in such courses is limited and is a main deterrent. Additionally, without intentional advocates, students are less likely to enroll in these courses on their own. Latino students enrolled in high school AP courses credit teachers as a primary resource in communicating general information about AP courses and motivating them to consider enrolling in such courses. The results from this identify several recommendations for educators to consider in their overall effort to increase the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses including improving information access, aligning curriculum to support preparation for AP courses, and establishing an advocacy and support

program. Recommendations for further research includes a similar study identifying factors that influence enrollment in pre-AP courses at the middle school level from the perspective of Latino students.

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Chapter I

Introduction

“The source of America’s prosperity, then, has never been merely how ably we accumulate wealth, but how well we educate our people. This has never been more true than it is today. In a 21st century world where jobs can be shipped wherever there’s an internet connection; where a child born in Dallas is competing with children in Delhi; where your best job qualification is not what you do, but what you know – education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity and success, it is a prerequisite.”

President Barack Obama

March 10, 2009

Address to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
on a complete and competitive education

Education has long been considered as the “key” to the American dream and personal success. Earning an education in school has meant an opportunity to attend college and eventually pursue a professional career that would ensure those inalienable rights of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” as stated in our nation’s Declaration of Independence. Moreover, a college education could offer career choices and economic freedom allowing for improved social status and an acceptable place in society. Our country was founded on the basis that an individual could achieve personal success provided that one had the freedom to pursue opportunity and work hard for their own success. While our constitution provides the foundation for democracy, equality, and guaranteed rights, its strength and legacy can only be measured by the democratic participation of citizens. Our nation’s early years are best remembered as creating a

framework that would provide general objectives for securing life and liberty. Although this framework was not intended to govern every aspect of society, it is understood that social functions must support and preserve democracy and equality. For example, providing an education to citizens was not an explicit constitutional goal. However, education is necessary in preserving our democracy by affording individuals with opportunities to secure life and liberty through literacy, self governance, and democratic thought. The intended purpose of schooling has been described as one that would fulfill specific roles of preserving democracy, affording vocations, ensuring global competitiveness, and eliminating poverty (Christensen, 2008). Additionally, the purpose of schooling is necessary to “promote economic development and develop human capital” (Spring, 2001). While a guaranteed right to an education is not explicit in the United States Constitution, under the Equal Protection Clause found in the 14th amendment, individual states do have the responsibility to protect the rights of individuals by ensuring that “all men are created equal.” Specifically, the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution extends the Bill of Rights to states to prohibit states from denying “any person of life, liberty, or property”.

Throughout our early history, education has served a critical role in how our nation has responded to crisis, economics, and global leadership. During the early 18th century, immigrants put their hopes and dreams in America, the land of opportunity, and sought to seek that opportunity and the “key to success” that would ensure a better way of life than in their native countries. Of the various events that influenced policy on schooling, there were two critical events fundamental to school reform efforts that forced

schools to innovate and implement necessary changes to meet the social demands of the 1950s (Christensen, 2008). These two events included the 1954 landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* to desegregate schools and the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in 1957. From these two major events, the focus and intent of schooling would include rigor in academics, enrichment experiences, and equality for all. However, as policy in education has evolved over the last fifty years, the intent and focus of schooling has not been realized for all students. While education has come a long way in addressing equality in schools, there is much room to improve equity in what schools offer in teaching and learning. Moreover in the midst of increased global competition, dramatic population increases of Hispanic or Latino students, and persistent achievement gaps, offering a basic and equal education will no longer be adequate. Instead, schools must offer learning experiences that promote 21st century skills not just for individual success but as critical components to the future of our national economy, leadership, and global standing. Much like the "race to space" that was sparked by the launch of Sputnik in 1957, we are in a race competing for a place in the global economy and environment. In a time where our economic prosperity is dependent on our capacity for knowledge and information, creativity, innovation, global awareness, and communication, the United States is behind other industrialized countries in college completion rates. College completion rates have become an increasingly important factor in determining our standing as the leader in a global society and economy. College Board, a leader in advanced academics and college entry systems, recently reported that only approximately nineteen percent of Hispanics, ages twenty-five through thirty-four, completed a two year

degree or higher in 2008. At nineteen percent, Hispanics that completed at least two years of college or more was much lower as compared to African Americans at thirty percent, Whites at forty-nine percent, and Asian students at seventy percent (College Board, 2010). In a recent policy report, College Board (2009) projected a “seismic shift” in the demographics of student entering college. Ethnic minority students are expected to account for most if not all of the growth in the number high school graduates over the next ten years. Hispanics alone are expected to account for almost ninety percent of growth in the number of high school graduates versus a negative thirteen percent growth rate for White, non-Hispanics (p.4). Hispanics are the fastest growing population group in public schools and expected to be the largest group of high school graduates in the U.S. by 2015 (College Board, 2008). College Board (2009), states that “the future influence and importance of the Latino population is clear” and the growth of the Latino population has “broad implications for colleges and universities” nationally (p.1). Moreover, in a country where career choices and future national and individual prosperity depend on individuals earning a college education, Latinos are least likely to have equal life choices and opportunities similar to their counterparts. Considering that Latinos will continue to be the largest growing population and as fewer Latinos are likely to earn a college degree, our country’s own economic future and prosperity also hang in the balance. Colleges and universities are preparing for demographic shifts and the likelihood that if college entrance and attendance projections remain true, fewer students will enroll in and complete college. In a recent publication and resource book, College Board (2009) compiled strategies for improving recruitment, admissions, retention, and

support of Latino students in preparing for and successfully completing college. This report and sourcebook reinforces the need to pay close attention to the needs and interests of a significant population that is critical to the success of all stakeholders. Ultimately, with the Latino population growing at a faster rate than other groups, but with lower rates of enrollment in advanced courses and college entrance and completion, schools must consider transforming practice in teaching and learning that will raise the rigor in every classroom and encouraging and supporting more Latino students to enroll in and succeed in advanced academic courses.

Within the last fifty years, advanced placement (AP) courses have become an integral part of the school culture and a necessary component in helping students prepare and plan for the rigor and completion of college coursework. More importantly, the intended learning objectives and skills taught through AP courses align with the demands of 21st century learning. Additionally, colleges and universities recognize that the 21st century challenge includes access and diversity issues in higher education. Moreover, to meet such a challenge, colleges and universities are concerned with (1) promoting access and opportunity for all and (2) providing students with learning experiences that will best prepare them for the global workplace and society (College Board, 2009).

Research Problem

AP courses are designed to be innovative and rigorous and also encourage and promote critical thinking, cultural awareness, collaboration, and enhance communication skills. Currently, most high schools across our nation offer AP courses for students choosing to pursue advanced academics in hopes of preparing for college and

professional careers especially in the areas of math and science. While AP courses could potentially serve as enriched learning experiences for all students, course enrollment for non-Anglo students that are traditionally underserved is much lower than for their Anglo counterparts. Despite numerous efforts on the part of College Board and public school systems to ensure equity and access to these courses, enrollment for non-Anglo students, especially Latino students remains low. Typically, these courses are limited primarily due to budget constraints, entrance criteria, and governing policies. Students that demonstrate AP and college bound potential are recommended for AP courses. In particular, students that are identified in early years for other programs such as bilingual education or special education, are less likely to be prepared to enroll in AP courses in later years. Overall, enrollment for Latino students in AP courses has typically been much lower than Anglo and Asian students but higher than African American students (College Board, 2010). College Board has developed and implemented several initiatives to address enrollment gaps. However, according to the latest enrollment figures, Latino enrollment in AP courses remains low as compared to the majority of students enrolled (College Board, 2010).

While there are policies that focus on equity and equality in AP courses, there are other factors that hinder or limit student enrollment in such courses. The reality of students selecting AP courses on their own is dependent on external variables such as student advocacy, local budgets, education policy, social and cultural rules, and school organization. Unfortunately, for students hoping to select better futures by way of AP courses and college, their academic choices may not be their own but perhaps the result

of bureaucratic controls within school systems as organizations that field political pressures from parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. The proverbial piece of the economic and social “pie” is much smaller than anticipated with the controls of advanced academics, quality of education, and equal opportunities. Essentially, the education necessary to afford opportunities for attaining socioeconomic power vis-à-vis access and success in college becomes scarce. As a result, the scarcity of educational opportunities resulting in college entrance and successful completion gives rise to conflict in selecting the best method in which to distribute and support the limited resource of AP courses in schools (Morgan, 1998). In the selection of efficient methods, politics and will surely be at the forefront guiding and influencing policy on behalf of groups vying for power and control.

Advanced placement courses are considered to be a limited resource demanded by various interest groups including parents, teachers, students, and business. Under pressure from various groups, the school system, as a bureaucratic organization and polity, must decide upon a means for developing and adopting policy that will govern entrance requirements, funding, and resources for advanced placement courses in local schools. Since schools differ in organizational structure and culture, policies surrounding AP programs in schools will have varying methods of control. Further, since these local policies are not intended or required to include all students, AP programs in public schools may lead to a form of segregation which limits student academic opportunities in the public school system and ultimately, college and career choices for future generations (Meier, 1991).

Despite research that implicates AP programs as a means of re-segregating students (Valencia, 1991), these programs are still supported and remain an integral part of our educational system. In the United States, education is considered to be the gateway to power, prestige, economics and the possibility of a better life. However, the policy and practice of advanced placement programs are criticized as a form of tracking or ability grouping that may largely determine which children will benefit from access to these programs (Meier, 1991).

Purpose of the Study

Despite College Board's recent efforts to review policies and practices that contribute to the gap between Anglo and Non-Anglo student enrollment in advanced placement courses, Latino enrollment in such courses remains low as compared to the majority of those enrolled. Despite reports, studies, and literature surrounding equity and access in the AP program, literature is limited with respect to factors that influence AP enrollment direct from the perspective of Latino students. The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions and attitudes towards advanced placement programs that affect and influence the enrollment of Latino students in advanced placement courses.

Moreover, since limited information directly from students themselves it was important to identify factors direct from the perspective of Latino students. Additionally, the micropolitics involved in the course enrollment, policy development, social implications, and ethics in providing equitable access for all students, especially Latino students, were reviewed. Finally, the roles of parents, teachers, and administrators in enrolling and engaging Latino students in advanced placement courses were identified and discussed.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were the following:

1. How do Latino students perceive Advanced Placement courses?
2. What do Latino students identify as factors that have contributed to their decision to enroll or not enroll in AP courses?
3. What is the role of parents, teachers, and administrators in the enrollment of Latino students in AP courses?

Design of the Study

A research design based on qualitative methodology and qualitative case study methods will be selected for this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998). Moreover, a naturalistic inquiry approach to this study will involve a constructivist paradigm in evaluating and interpreting data collected through this case study. The qualitative case study is defined by the research process, unit of study, and its end product (Merriam, 1998). This case study involved identifying a high school that had a significant number of Latino students, located in an urban district, and had a significant enrollment of students in AP courses. Personal in-depth interviews were utilized as the critical feature within this case study so as to allow for flexibility and opportunities for further exploration of topics or ideas that emerge from the research. Data from interviews were digitally recorded and compared with notes taken to ensure a thorough and proper data analysis. Data collected from this study were then inductively coded and categorized for the purpose of “unitizing” raw data to describe and interpret relevant data to construct meaning and understanding of topics discussed. The information drawn out

from this process of unitizing were sorted into more descriptive categories so as to infer about the context of implications of policy and practice affecting the enrollment of Latino students in high school Advanced Placement courses. Trustworthiness of this study emphasized triangulation, member checking, and peer review to assure reliability and validity.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following key terms used in this study were:

21st Century Learning – Refers to the skills needed to meet the demands of a global environment. Skills include critical thinking, collaboration, adaptability, creativity, communication, and cultural awareness (Wagner, 2008).

Ability Grouping – The practice of sorting students, particularly during elementary and middle school, into classes or work groups based on their perceived ability levels and are typically exposed to different curricula and instruction (Wheelock, p.75).

Academic Accessibility – Refers to Pre-AP learning opportunities that prepare students for college level work in high school (Klopfenstein, 2010).

Advanced Placement (AP) – The College Board describes AP as the college level courses offered in high school. These courses are described as more demanding than general high school courses and are comparable to first year college courses (College Board, 2010).

Gifted and Talented – Selective programs to provide advanced or accelerated instruction to students identified, through standardized testing, as having high or above average ability (Wheelock, p.75).

Latino – The term is considered a cultural category comprised of individuals from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America, and the Dominican Republic (Suárez-Orozco & Pérez, 2002). College Board (2009) also describes this population as Latino instead of Hispanic unless research has documented Hispanic.

Schooling Disadvantage – Refers to the inequities in schools as a result of language, lunch program eligibility, AP course offerings, teacher preparation, racial isolation (Yun & Moreno, 2006).

Second-Generation Segregation – The practice of academic grouping in a discriminatory manner so that Hispanic students are separated from other students. Grouping is based on participation in special programs such as special education, vocational education, college preparation, and gifted and talented education (Meier & Stewart, p.1).

Tracking – The practice of grouping students into classes by ability and organizing curriculum by its level of difficulty (Loveless, p.1); the practice of sorting students into different classes or courses of study (college preparatory, vocational, general) based on educators' judgments of students' intellectual abilities, prior performance, or predictions of students' future accomplishments (Wheelock, p.77).

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the threats toward external validity that can confirm, explain, or clarify findings (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). Specifically, external validity is enhanced through multiple resources, observations, and evidence. Delimitations for this study include the following:

1. The high school for this study was selected by the researcher based on specific criteria including student demographic figures, AP participation and results, and college readiness rates.
2. Participants for this study were selected through recommendations from school administration including counselors and principals.
3. This study focused on the perceptions and experiences with the AP program from the perspective of Latino students and not on other student groups.
4. This study focused only on the high school AP program and not on other academic programs related to student achievement.

Limitations

The limitations in a qualitative study relate to internal validity. Primarily, the design of the qualitative case study is bounded and particularistic and preferred in studying educational practice and programs that could inform policy (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, Merriam (1998) points out that qualitative case studies are limited since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Since the selection of participants largely depended on the recommendations of school administration, biases may exist dependent on perceived credibilities and relationships. Additionally, since this

study is centered on personal experiences and perceptions, it may be difficult to truly identify clear inherent factors that favor power and authority in the enrollment of students in AP courses. Limitations for this study include:

1. In this study, the researcher was the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data.
2. This study relied on a case study design which may inhibit generalization across other similar schools.
3. Selection of participants depended on individual recommendations and may present bias in the selection process.
4. The findings from this study relied on personal experiences and perspectives that may differ based on personal beliefs, backgrounds, and bias.

Significance of the Study

The race is on for *all* children to acquire the 21st century skills needed to earn a place in college and compete for the innovative and creative jobs that are quickly transforming the business landscape in the United States to one that is interdependent with the rest of the world. As most jobs that require “blue collar skills” are shipped to other countries, our economic future and leadership in a global economy will largely depend on how schools will transform not reform to meet the demands of a changing world (Schlechty, 1997). Further, individual economic prosperity and achieving the “American Dream” that the United States is best known for can only be realized with an equal and equitable education that affords “equality of opportunities” (Mickelson & Smith, p.291). The future of education in the United States and whether or not our

children are educated and prepared for jobs that still do not exist today is now more important than ever (Pink, 2005).

The challenge and opportunity of a global environment includes promoting rigorous learning and higher education that will prepare all students for “a 21st century workforce and citizenry” (College Board, 2009). Adding to this challenge and opportunity is the rapid growth of the Latino population that now exceeds the growth rates of all other groups. Higher education recognizes that changes are necessary in how Latino students are recruited, admitted, and supported in their college experiences (College Board, 2009). As such, high schools must also make changes to afford students, especially Latino students, opportunities for college level coursework prior to graduation. Moreover, identifying factors that influence AP enrollment from the perspective of the Latino student will be critical to analyzing current practice and informing future strategies for increasing enrollment in high school AP courses. This study will identify the factors that influence Latino students in their decision to enroll and participate in advanced placement courses in high school.

Summary

Education in the United States has remained as a cornerstone in a market system that promotes meritocracy where achieving economic independence and improved social status is dependent on each individual’s own effort to succeed (Iceland, 2003). However, “education is political” (Abalos, p.141) and determining “what” and “who” should be taught have been at the forefront of political debate and discussion (Stout, Tallerico, and Scribner, 1995). Further, promoting “equality of opportunity” through reform efforts and

policy has not necessarily ensured “equality of outcomes” or equity in what is provided to students through teaching and learning (Iceland, p. 139). Although current policies stipulate that all students have an equal access to education, critics argue that inequities persist in learning experiences and “that the content and process of education differ for children according to their race, gender, and class” (Mickelson & Smith, p.299).

Moreover, Latino students are less likely to enroll in AP courses which are characterized high level learning including collaboration, problem solving, and discussion. Recent statistics of minority students enrolled in AP courses, which are considered challenging and rigorous, indicate that there is cause for concern. In particular, Latino enrollment in AP programs remains low despite steady increases in population growth. Additionally, as the Latino population continues to grow at a rapid rate the college enrollment and success rates for Latinos remain low. Identifying current policies and practice that may contribute to such low levels of enrollment is critical to identify and determine appropriate policies and strategies that will support increased rates of participation and success in Advanced Placement for Latino students. Also, identifying the perceptions and beliefs that affect Latino enrollment in high school Advanced Placement programs is of the utmost importance to best determine critical roles and actions that will improve and promote equality of opportunity and outcomes. This study will identify the factors that influence Latino students to enroll or not enroll in high school AP courses. The perspective directly from Latino students will be investigated and analyzed for informing practice intended to increase the number of Latino students enrolled in and successfully completing Advanced Placement courses prior to graduating from high school.

The following chapter includes a review of the literature that provides an overview of the Advanced Placement program, including a historical background, enrollment growth, and implications for college preparedness. The literature review will also promote a better understanding of the need for identifying factors that influence AP enrollment for Latino students by highlighting implications such as maximized educational achievement, segregation, and perpetuation of a cycle of poverty. The review will conclude with policy and practice that influence AP enrollment as well as identified support systems that contribute to improved enrollment in AP for all students. In Chapter 3, the research methodology will be discussed and presented. For this research, a qualitative case study will be used. Research design, participant and site selection, and data collection and analysis are described and reviewed. The chapter concludes with discussion related to trustworthiness and securing validity and credibility for this study. In Chapter 4 findings from this qualitative case study will be presented. Chapter 5 will summarize the study with conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to review the background and development of the Advanced Placement program including the development of policy to describe the politics involved in offering Advanced Placement programs in schools, and discuss tracking and segregation through AP programs in schools. Implications for engaging and supporting students in Advanced Placement courses through support systems and special programs such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) were also reviewed to provide possible solutions for increasing enrollment in AP courses for Latino students which have had lower rates of matriculation than other student groups.

Background and Development of the Advanced Placement Program

Advanced placement courses have been a major part of deliberative discussion with regard to ability grouping and tracking for over a century. Beginning in 1892, Charles Eliot, president of Harvard University, headed “The Committee of Ten” charged with identifying the need for preparation programs that would benefit education at the university level (Wheelock, 1994). Through deliberations, the Committee of Ten determined that there were students capable of completing college level coursework before completing high school. In the early 1900s, advanced placement was considered as a means for enrichment and ability grouping that separated gifted students from their peers (Lacy, p. 20) to best prepare identified students for college coursework. In 1952, concerned for the “elite” students that were unchallenged, faculty members from Harvard, Yale, and Princeton proposed that advanced placement courses, directed by the

College Board, be offered in secondary schools (Lacy, 2010). As a result of that proposal, the advanced placement program was developed with the intention of preparing able students for college before graduating from high school (College Board, 1994). The development of the advanced placement program included offering college level courses to students in public high schools. Since 1953, the advanced placement program, sponsored by the College Board, has provided opportunities for earning college credit to students willing and able to complete the rigorous coursework. Further, the program outlines coursework and provides training and access to materials necessary for implementing advanced placement courses at the high school level. Though the College Board monitors and sets the courses, curricula, learning objectives, professional development, and resources for schools, the College Board does not set policy governing how advanced placement courses are implemented in schools. Rather, the development of advanced placement policies is left to policymakers in individual states, colleges and universities. As a result, policies vary from state to state dependent on the interests of individual schools, colleges, teachers, parents and students.

Advantages

Students enrolled in advanced placement courses may earn college credit and are afforded learning experiences that will better prepare them for a college career.

Advanced placement students are more likely to complete an undergraduate college program and advance to earning a graduate degree as well. In a study to determine the role of Advanced Placement in earning advanced degrees, “70% of individuals who had taken one or more AP courses or exams during high school had obtained an advanced

degree, compared with 43% of those who had not taken an AP course or exam” (Bleske-Rechek, Lubinski, Benbow, p.219). As such, the benefits of providing advanced placement programs in schools are far reaching. For colleges and universities, the prospect of recruiting the best and brightest that are prepared to enter college is critical in legitimizing the college curricula and programs. For students and parents, advanced placement courses provide the enhanced learning experiences that promote college attendance, earning college credit, and in essence an education that is the “key to success.” For schools, AP courses legitimize rigorous coursework that will best prepare students for college entry and success.

Enrollment and Growth

Nationally, the Advanced Placement Program has had tremendous growth in enrollment and the number of AP exams taken. Lacy (2010) reported that, “about half of all U.S. secondary schools were involved with AP by the mid 1990s” (p.35). This significant increase in AP enrollment and examinations taken could likely be attributed to the College Board’s commitment to equity and access. The College Board published a policy brief outlining its commitment to advocating and promoting access and diversity in Advanced Placement programs. In this brief, the College Board recognizes the importance of addressing demographic trends in the 21st century emphasizing that Hispanics alone will account for the majority of all growth in the number of high school graduates by the year 2020. Additionally, the College Board raises the concern of “recruitment, outreach, financial aid, curricular and other policy parameters as they seek to educate a 21st-century workforce and citizenry” (College Board, 2009). In 1994, The

College Board (1994, p.8) reported that "...the Advanced Placement Program offered 29 courses and examinations to some 460,000 students in nearly 11,000 high schools in the United States and abroad." Most recently, College Board reported that approximately 1.8 million students in over 17,000 schools took Advanced Placement exams in the 2009-2010 academic school year (College Board, 2010a). Enrollment of non-Anglo students in the AP program has also increased greatly with more students from urban and multiracial schools taking AP exams. Lacy, (2010) noted that, "19.5 percent of all U.S. examinees in 1988 were from minority populations" (p.35).

However, while the number of students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses and taking AP exams has continued to increase, enrollment for non-Anglo students remains low. Only 26% of advanced placement exams were taken by underrepresented persons including African American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian students (College Board, 1994). For Latinos, specifically, of the 3.1 million AP exams taken, approximately 14% or 440 thousand exams were taken by students identified as Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and or Hispanic (College Board, 2010c.).

In Texas, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) reports that, from 1990 to 2007, participation in AP math programs has increased by 1005%. Specifically, there were 2,290 students in 1990 and just over 27,000 students taking AP calculus and statistics in 2007 (TEA, 2006). Despite this reported increase, non-Anglo students in Texas participate in AP courses and exams at a lower rate than their Anglo counterparts. Of the 325,000 AP exams taken in Texas in 2010, just over 107,000 exams were taken by students identified as Hispanic, Mexican-American, or Puerto Rican (College Board,

2010). Moreover, of the 33,800 AP calculus and statistics exams taken in 2010, only 8,351 were taken by students identified as Hispanic, Mexican-American, or Puerto Rican (College Board, 2010).

The growth of Advanced Placement programs in schools can partly be attributed to an increased awareness of AP courses and recent studies on the effect that these courses have had on students becoming college ready. Goldrick-Rab and Mazzeo (2005) determined through their research that students enrolled in rigorous coursework are more likely to have higher grades and enter college. Also, Bleske-Rechek, Lubinski, and Benbow (2004) found that the Advanced Placement program provides students with learning experiences that are specialized and academically challenging for students. Further, students that participate in college preparation programs are also more likely to receive counseling and guidance that promotes college readiness and gain the skills necessary to navigate their college careers successfully (Goldrick-Rab and Mazzeo, p.108). In addition to the college readiness factor, AP courses also provide students with opportunities to earn college credit while in high school. The opportunity to earn college credit in high school and essentially reduce the overall cost of attending college is also another noted factor to students enrolling in AP courses (Casserly, 1986).

Support for Advanced Placement Programs

The AP program has also been supported by initiatives that have encouraged participation in AP courses and exams. Such initiatives include increased accountability measures, government and private funding that assist in providing AP courses in schools and supplement or reimburse AP exam fees, and alignment of curriculum to AP

objectives (TEA, 2006; Lacy, 2010). In Texas, the Advanced Placement Incentive Program has provided schools with grants for offering AP courses, reimbursements for training, awards based on student examination scores, and reimbursement for examination fees (TAC Ch. 74.29). Since 1997, AP participation and success rates have been reported on the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) for each campus (TEA, 2006).

In addition to standardized test results, performance indicators on the AEIS for student success in schools include college readiness indicators such as completion of advanced courses, participation and performance on AP and college entrance examinations, and the number of college ready graduates (TEA, 2010b). Since these rates are part of the school accountability system in Texas, schools are held accountable for participation and success in AP for all students. Most recently, the Texas Education Agency has emphasized a focus on developing the AP program in Texas schools through its Lighthouse Initiative for Texas Classrooms. This initiative is expected to support and guide teachers in collaborating and coordinating academic programs between middle and high schools to best prepare students through Pre-AP coursework for participation and success in AP courses and exams (TEA, 2006).

Policy and Politics in Advanced Placement Programs

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) passed in 2001 and signed into law in 2002 intended to improve schools through accountability measures tied to student academic achievement and performance. More importantly this historic policy would encourage educational practice that would finally close the academic achievement gap

between student groups. The emphasis to better educate students for improved performance has brought about conversation to promote “more Advanced Placement courses in our high schools” (Wagner, p.6). To close the achievement gap, schools are expected to provide all students with learning experiences that include learning and acquiring 21st century skills such as critical thinking, effective communication, networking, cultural awareness, and creativity. Moreover, courses designed to promote college readiness, such as Advanced Placement, must be made available to all students and no longer just to the small select group of students identified as college bound (Wagner, 2008). While NCLB does specify college readiness as a measure of student achievement, its policy requirements and focus on improved academic performance through advanced placement programs through school reform can likely “have an effect on how well students are prepared to access and succeed in college” (Goldrick-Rab and Mazzeo, p.107). Consequently, NCLB has the potential to influence college readiness through increased AP availability and access in schools, improved student academic performance, and the acquisition of skills that could lead to increased access and enrollment in higher education (USDOE, 2004).

In the recent publication, *A Complete Education*, the United States Department of Education outlines its plan to include several additional key points to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). One of the critical points in this report emphasizes “providing accelerated learning opportunities to make postsecondary success attainable” (USDOE, p.2). Further the reauthorization of ESEA will offer grants to support programs that provide students with access to college readiness programs such as

Advanced Placement. Within this initiative is the challenge to promote college readiness standards that will prepare all students for college and career.

The School Organization as a Polity

Politics in education has the potential to derail or hinder access to Advanced Placement programs in schools. In his examination of the AP program, Sadler (2010) stated “AP now as a role in national politics” noting the 2006 call by then President George W. Bush to expand the AP program in schools by training more teachers, providing grants to schools to provide more courses and subsidize exam fees for students (p.3). Joel Spring (1988) describes politics in education as “a complex interrelationship among government administrators, interest groups, politicians, and knowledge brokers” (p.1). Spring (1988) contends that in education, politics exist to serve the interests of the local community. Moreover, schools field demands by groups to preserve and promote their political and self-interests ranging from preparing workers, promoting equity, and improving economic position.

According to Spring (1988), conflict in education “occurs as different groups attempt to have the educational system serve their own interests and ideologies” (p.23). Interest groups influencing local policy are individuals or groups considered to be stakeholders in the educational success of students. With regard to advanced placement policy, groups such as parents, teachers, counselors, and school administrators affect access and participation in AP programs in schools (Yun & Moreno, 2006; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004; Jodry, Robles-Piña, and Nichter, 2004; Holland and Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Consequently, policies that govern school curriculum and programs such as AP,

are implemented according to needs and demands of stakeholders and political groups. Spring (1988) notes that for example, the middle class demands college preparation courses while mostly poor and minority children are placed in general or vocational educational programs (p.93). According to Spring (1988), access to AP programs in schools is largely determined by interest groups with the most representative and influential power that stand to be more successful in influencing policy and practice that will serve their own interests.

Conflicting Interests

Parents, students, teachers, and community members all have a stake in how schools manage and determine access to programs such as Advanced Placement (Sadler 2010). Students are encouraged to enroll in Advanced Placement courses since these courses are considered to be an important factor in preparing students for the rigors of college coursework and accessing college (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004; Casserly, 1986). Moreover, the AP program is considered the top program for providing advanced coursework in schools (Sadler, 2010). However, AP courses are not offered at all schools. Further, the number of AP courses offered varies greatly from school to school (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004).

Since AP courses are considered to provide future benefits for students and are limited, access to these courses may be difficult. Essentially, AP courses become the scarce resource that produces conflict in its distribution among competing interest groups. Here, the concept of conflict focuses on the “competition over scarce resources” (Marshall, 1991) and where competing interests collide (Morgan, 1998) with respect to

accessing AP in schools. With the presence of such conflict, it comes as no surprise that each stakeholder could have a different perspective on how the Advanced Placement program should be implemented and managed (Sadler, 2010).

Perspectives may vary regarding entrance requirements, funding, instructors, and course offerings. Hence, the politics involved in resolving these conflicting issues in local school systems become the micropolitics that influence the development of advanced placement policy in an attempt to accommodate competing demands.

Organizational Coalitions

The concept of organizational coalitions is important in the analysis of micropolitics in the promotion of advanced placement in schools. The coalitions formed between and within groups serve to manage conflicting demands and propose dominant ideologies as the accepted norm for schools. Moreover, coalitions that are formed to influence the development of policies are intended to serve the interests of the group demanding access to AP courses (Morgan, 1998). Establishing coalitions is important to parents hoping to secure their children's access to advanced placement courses since parents perceive that the advanced placement program is vital to their children's success in school, future college career, and securing social status (McKerrow, 1997). For example, as a PTA president, a parent has an established coalition with the school administration. If the PTA president's child does not qualify for advanced placement courses, their coalition with the school administration is expected to be highly influential in securing a seat for their child in the advanced placement courses.

Stakeholder Roles and Interests in Advanced Placement Programs

Students reported that while in high school, they enrolled in Advanced Placement courses because they were (1) encouraged by others including their parents, teachers, counselors, and friends, (2) recognized the benefit of reducing college costs by earning college credit in high school, and (3) preferred the refuge, structure and rigorous expectations of the AP class not found in general classes (4) identified that the AP program provided a path to higher education (Casserly, 1986; Holland & Hinton, 2009; Jodry et al, 2004). In addition, students reported on the importance of caring adults and social connections that made a difference in their participation in AP courses (Holland & Hinton, 2009; Jodry et al, 2004).

Parents comprise one of the many influential groups in the development of local school policy. Parents of students enrolled or planning to enroll in advanced academic courses will take measures to assure that their own children have opportunities for access and success despite egalitarian ideals of promoting equity for all children. Additionally, earning college credit in high school and being admitted into better universities by through Advanced Placement courses in school legitimizes a parent's persistence and "political maneuvering" in assuring that their children are enrolled in advanced placement courses (Casserly, 1986; Loveless, 1999; Oakes, 1985). Parents that have the ability to ensure that their children receive differentiated learning experiences are perceived as better, caring parents. Promoting policy that will benefit one's own child generally equates to the acceptable role of good parenting (McKerrow, 1997).

Teachers who may or may not be selected to teach advanced placement courses also have a tremendous stake in the advanced placement policy. Teachers selected to teach advanced courses have opportunities to participate in highly recognized training in their subject areas (College Board, 1994). Teachers of advanced placement courses are considered to be experts in their subject area and as a result are considered highly respected amongst colleagues. In addition to social status, advanced placement teachers work with the best and brightest of students as well as receive stipends and additional funding for course materials and resources. With such benefits, the selection of advanced placement teachers can spark some debate. Moreover, teachers jockey for teaching assignments considered to be on advanced tracks (Oakes, 1985). Oakes (1985) also found that principals may use such advanced assignments as rewards for teachers. Essentially, teachers with less experience or considered marginal are not selected to teach the advanced curriculum but placed in general academic courses where students are most in need of the most qualified and prepared teachers. Also, teachers assigned to “low ability” tracks are less likely to identify themselves as “master teachers” and are more likely not certified to teach in their assigned subject (Oakes, p. 227). If a teacher is not selected, one can see that conflict will arise as the teacher’s interest for teaching the brightest students, participating in specialized training, and earning additional income will be brought to the attention of the political system.

For universities, recruiting highly capable students prepared for college level courses and completing graduation requirements is highly beneficial. By recruiting such students, universities are able to promote more rigorous and challenging curricular

programs that compete with other top-notch universities (College Board, 1994).

Generally, universities able to tout challenging programs with high completion rates, stand to recruit the best and brightest in the nation. Camara (2005), states that high school grades and class ranking are the most critical factor in college admissions (p.65). Additionally, there is increasing importance of students completing rigorous high school courses. Since advanced placement programs play such a pivotal role in university admissions, the need for policy outlining entrance to advanced placement is necessary to assure that students have equal access.

Access to Advanced Placement Programs in Schools

Access to advanced academic coursework in schools is generally open to all students who choose to enroll in Advanced Placement courses. Moreover, in an effort to promote college readiness for all students, especially for non-Anglo and disadvantaged students, increasing access to AP courses in schools has been at the forefront of political and corporate discussion. Within this effort, there is also discussion about preparing students in earlier grades for AP coursework (Dougherty & Mellor, 2010). While prerequisite courses are not necessarily required to enroll in AP courses, for immediate enrollment, there are schools that require that students demonstrate strong academic performance in the particular subject area of the AP course requested (Dougherty & Mellor, 2010; Sadler, 2010). In addition to open enrollment, potential AP students are identified through the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) or general academic performance (Casserly, 1986).

Access and Enrollment in AP for Latino Students

Although access to Advanced Placement programs is very much promoted and supported, gaps in participation and success remain low for non-Anglo students, especially for Latino students. Adding to this challenge is the explosive growth of Hispanic or Latino students in our public schools. Latino population figures have continued to rise and account for over sixty percent of the population growth in Texas (Eschbach, 2009). By the year 2040, Latinos will account for at least eighty percent of the population growth in Texas. In Texas schools, Latino students account for almost fifty percent of the student population in schools. In the 2007-2008 school year, there were over 4.6 million students enrolled in Texas schools. As a group, Latinos were the largest student group at just over 2.2 million. Anglo students were the second largest group at over 1.6 million and African American students the third largest under seven hundred thousand. Since enrollment in AP courses is open to all students in Texas, over 1 million of the 2.2 million Latino students enrolled in secondary schools are generally eligible to enroll in advanced placement courses. However, of the 1 million Latino students eligible to enroll in advanced placement courses, only nineteen percent were enrolled in advanced or dual enrollment/college credit courses in high schools. By comparison, Anglo student enrollment was just over twenty-eight percent and African American at a low sixteen percent. Enrollment for Asian students was the highest at forty-four percent (TEA, 2010).

Tracking and Academic Grouping

Tracking, also known as curriculum tracking, in schools has been the subject of debate surrounding access and enrollment in Advanced Placement courses in schools. Tracking, mostly identified in secondary schools, generally consists of placing students in specific classes based on student ability, academic potential, or interest (Loveless, 1999). Students that are placed in low academic tracks typically are “minority” students from less privileged backgrounds (Mickelson & Smith, 1995). Research indicates that tracking “denies low-ability students challenging curricular opportunities and stigmatizes them with demoralizing labels” (Loveless, p. 16). Additionally, Loveless (1999) reports that the achievement gap between students in academic versus vocational tracks was greater than the gap between students remaining in school and those that drop out of school (p.16). Examples of curriculum tracks include special education, bilingual education, vocational education, and college preparation (Meier & Stewart, 1991). Tracking in schools begins in the early grades as students are identified for gifted programs. In Texas, schools are required to identify the “gifted and talented” students as early as kindergarten and provide “educational enrichment” (Romo & Falbo, p. 35). Generally, students that receive “educational enrichment” in the early grades are placed in academic tracks that will offer the learning experiences necessary for success in challenging coursework later in secondary school and eventually college (Romo & Falbo, 1996; Dougherty & Mellor, 2010). Students that are identified as poor and minority are more likely to be enrolled in classes delineated for low achieving students (Loveless, p. 16). With regard to Advanced Placement programs, Spring (1988) indicates that despite

claims that access to advanced academics is unlimited, students are placed in educational tracks based on their learning experiences and academic performance. Further, Spring (1988) suggests that schools perpetuate a sense of elitism as students are placed in either college preparation or vocational tracks. According to Ladson-Billings (1997), the prestige and benefits associated with a college preparation program such as Advanced Placement are the result of the exclusionary measures supported by policy based on a meritocratic system. As such, the AP program then becomes a program of expanded learning for only a few select students (Ladson-Billings, 1997). The result of tracking students into particular curricular programs can affect enrollment in AP courses as students that are placed “in a low ability academic track are less likely to participate in the AP program because they do not have the preparation necessary to perform college level work while in high school” (Klopfenstein, p118). Holland and Hinton (2009) indicate that students that are Latino and from low socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to be placed in college preparation tracks.

Second-Generation Discrimination

In their description of “second-generation discrimination”, Meier & Stewart (1991) discuss how Latino students have “remained highly segregated” and “consistently underrepresented in classes for gifted students” based on language (p.79). More importantly, Meier and Stewart (1991) propose that while bilingual education is valued, bilingual education has been used to legitimize ability grouping with fewer Latino students represented in gifted programs. Meier & Stewart (1991) argue that there are specific forces that affect second-generation discrimination for Latino students. Of the

forces described, Meier & Stewart (1991) argue that the most critical is that of political representation. In political representation, identify the teacher as a key player in evaluating students' ability and potential. As a result, the teacher's assessment and advocacy of student academic ability can serve to either promote or hinder student enrollment in advanced academic programs such as gifted and talented, college preparatory, or Advanced Placement courses. Through second-generation discrimination, Meier & Stewart (1991) contend that access to "the best education available" will remain limited for Hispanic students (p. 167).

Schooling Disadvantage

Yun and Moreno (2006) analyzed AP enrollment data to determine the accessibility and equity of AP courses in schools. Yun and Moreno (2006) posit that such an analysis provides a better understanding of how school systems affect college access. Moreover, Yun and Moreno (2006) identify school demographics such as the percentage of English language learners, lunch program eligibility, AP course availability, teacher qualification and preparation, and concentration of racial and ethnic groups that contribute to "schooling disadvantage". Yun and Moreno (2006) refer to schooling disadvantage as the combination of school demographics or factors that affect learning experiences and outcomes for students which later result in equitable and equal access to attend and succeed in college. In their findings, Yun and Moreno (2006) noted that schools that serve mostly African American and Latino students "had lower college eligibility and participation rates, fewer advanced placement (AP) courses, and fewer experienced teachers, than did students from White-majority schools" (p.12). In a similar

study, Solorzano & Ornelas (2004) determined that AP enrollment rates for Latinos remained low despite attending high performing schools with high availability of AP courses and high rates of general AP enrollment.

Academic Accessibility

Since Advanced Placement courses are considered rigorous and challenging, there is a growing effort to replace the traditional high school curriculum with AP curriculum. Also, in an effort to promote equity and access for all students, policy makers are pushing for legislation that will expand the AP program for all students, especially those students that have traditionally been underserved and underrepresented in advanced academics (Dougherty & Mellor, 2010). However, these efforts are causing concern for the validity and credibility of the AP program. As more students are taking AP courses and taking AP exams, Dougherty and Mellor (2010) indicate that more students are not earning high scores on exams and have found that the relationship between AP participation and college graduation rates have disappeared for most students that did not score adequately on the AP exam (p. 221). Dougherty & Mellor (2010) contend that the strategy to enroll more students in AP courses is set up for failure if students are not adequately prepared for AP courses. Moreover, if the goal is to increase the number of AP participants, then all students must receive appropriate instruction that will best prepare them for college level coursework beginning in the early grades. While most schools have “open enrollment” for AP courses making AP accessible, there are concerns that AP courses are not “academically accessible” to all students especially, students that are at a disadvantage by language, ethnicity, and income (Dougherty & Mellor, 2010). Further,

although AP courses are made available to all students, if students are not provided with the learning opportunities needed to participate and succeed in more challenging courses from early grades, the commitment to access and equity for Advanced Placement programs remains well intended but falls short of its goals (Dougherty & Mellor, 2010).

Support Systems

As more students are encouraged to participate in advanced academics such as the Advanced Placement program, it will be critical to identify the appropriate systems that will support students enrolled or considering enrolling in AP courses (Holland & Hinton, 2009). Holland and Hinton (2009) also report that advocacy at the school level is crucial since students that have been consistently underrepresented in advanced academics rely greatly on their schools for advocacy, support, and to best communicate necessary preparations for successful participation. Moreover, non-Anglo students, including Latino students, are less likely to be enrolled in college level tracks and to have a working relationship with school personnel that could advocate their participation and enrollment. Support systems identified as critical to successful enrollment and participation in AP courses includes a developed college culture in schools and direct social support and advocacy. Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is another support system that has made significant progress in the enrollment and success of Latino students in AP programs.

College Culture Environment

In an analysis of Latino students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses in high schools, Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) recommended that K-12 institutions develop a

college culture in schools that would support access and enrollment in AP courses.

Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) identified the following six conditions in developing and maintaining a college culture in schools:

1. Support and encourage students to pursue advanced academics and college.
2. Provide access to rigorous courses including Advanced Placement and ensure an adequate proportionate number of students enrolled in AP.
3. Provide qualified teachers for all students.
4. Provide intensive academic support.
5. Develop a multicultural college culture identity.
6. Connect with parents and community around advanced academics

Social Support

Holland and Hinton (2009) also promote a college culture that is based on a social support model or system. Holland and Hinton (2009) describe the social support model as one that encourages and “fosters personalized relationships between students and staff so that frequent communication, academic norms, and the sharing of valuable resources exist” (p.26). The social support model advocated by Holland and Hinton (2004) includes creating smaller learning communities, social capital through networking, demonstrating an ethic of knowledge and care, and organizational structures that encourage the college culture. Through smaller learning communities, teachers are more able to connect with other staff members to monitor and advocate student progress and success towards college preparedness. Also, smaller communities encourage higher attendance rates, lower drop out rates, more involvement in extracurricular activities, and

higher graduation rates that all contribute to students more prepared for college (Holland & Hinton, 2004). Students report that they have access to teachers and staff members that care about them and connect with them. Students also report that they are less likely to drop out of school and more likely to enroll in more challenging classes as a result of knowing that they have someone that they can connect with and that cares about them (Holland & Hinton, 2004).

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)

Providing all students with quality educational experiences that will prepare them for college is part of a growing movement to enroll more students, especially those underserved, in Advanced Placement programs. Moreover, as more policies outlining access to advanced academics in schools are implemented, research indicates that early intervention programs for students are critical (Cunningham, Redmond, and Merisotis, 2003). Cunningham et al (2003) describe early intervention programs as programs that offer counseling, academic support, parent involvement, and mentoring. One such early intervention program includes AVID. AVID is described as a system that promotes college readiness and serves all students especially those students that have been underserved in advanced academics (AVID, 2010). AVID is available in over 4,500 schools and serves over 400,000 students in grades 4-12. Part of the AVID system is to enroll students in Advanced Placement courses and provide the support necessary for successful course completion. More importantly, students that are enrolled in AVID receive academic intervention, counseling, and mentoring that supports their progress and success in their AP courses (AVID, 2010). Holland and Hinton (2004) identify AVID as

a model that offers students an opportunity to prepare for college. Essentially, AVID provides a window of opportunity for promoting AP enrollment and supporting students in AP courses.

Summary

Public education and equal access to education have remained the most discussed topics in history, especially in times of social and global change. The legislative requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) demand dramatic increases in academic achievement for all students and are forcing school districts across the country to outline a vision for providing students with an education that will prepare students for personal success and valuing high expectations for all. Achievement for select groups of students is no longer acceptable. As schools deliberately plan on raising standards in teaching and learning to meet the NCLB requirements, educators will have no choice but to seek any means necessary to reduce the inequities in learning and student achievement with or without AP programs. Within the last decade, national enrollment in AP courses has doubled from a reported 844 thousand students in 2000 to 1.6 million in 2010 (College Board, 2010). While the increased numbers of students enrolled in AP courses, looks promising, the reported number enrolled in 2010 is only a fraction of students when compared to the total number of students that should be enrolled in AP courses. Moreover, the number of Latino students enrolled in AP courses remains low as compared to other students. Further, Latino students are least likely to enroll in AP courses, take AP exams, and enroll in college.

Increasing the enrollment and participation of Latino students in AP courses is dependent on the policies and practices of schools that will afford all students with quality educational experiences and raised academic achievement standards for all students. “The idea that every child can learn at high levels has considerable ideological appeal” (Schlechty, p.89), especially in the deliberation to provide rigorous college level coursework to all students. Creating a college culture in schools with levels of social support and advocacy are critical to providing Latino students with a support system that influences their decision to enroll or not participate in the AP program. AVID is an early intervention system that shows much promise for improving the enrollment and participation rates of Latino students in AP.

As we enter a new era of globalization, implementing AP programs in schools is an important goal in providing the rigor and preparation necessary for raising academic expectations and opportunity for all students. Ultimately, what will make the difference is to provide learning experiences for all students that will ensure that “no child is left behind” in their quest for equal life chances and an education that is their “key to success” in an ever changing world.

Chapter III

Methodology

Overview

Education in America has transformed from its pre-industrialization loyalty to knowledge for the elite to its current meritocratic commitment to affording all citizens equal opportunities for roles in a capitalist and democratic social hierarchy (Spring, 1996). Affording equal and equitable opportunities for individuals to earn a place in college and prepare for a professional career through a meaningful and rigorous education, ensures and preserves our democracy by promoting global competitiveness, eliminating poverty, and securing rights to life and liberty (Christensen, 2008; Spring 2001). Since 1955, the Advanced Placement program has served to identify students with college potential that could enroll and succeed in college coursework before graduating from high school. Further, by successfully completing AP courses, students are more likely to earn college credit, enroll in college, complete college, and earn advanced college degrees (Bleske-Rechek et al, 2004; Casserly, 1986; College Board, 1994; Lacy 2010). However, despite rushing towards fairness and equality, the objectification of racial or social identity masks the inherent inequities in education through political structures and norms (Ladson-Billings and Donnor, 2005). Enrollment in AP courses and the number of AP exams taken have dramatically increased over the last 60 years. However, this does not reflect equal growth patterns between all student groups including Latino students. Enrollment figures for Latino students lag behind in AP enrollment, AP exams taken, and college attendance and completion (TEA, 2010;

College Board, 2010). As the number of Latino students is projected to increase by as much as 90% over the next decade, affording Latino students with an education that will afford them with opportunities for college and 21st century careers is of the utmost importance (College Board, 2009; Wagner, 2008). More importantly, since AP courses influence college readiness, enrollment, and completion rates, identifying strategies and practice for increasing Latino enrollment in AP is critical (Bleske-Rechek et al, 2004; Casserly, 1986; College Board, 1994; Lacy 2010). The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that affect the enrollment of Latino students in high school.

Research Questions

The research questions in a qualitative research study are much like hypotheses and more precise to the nature of the study involved. Further, research questions must guide the qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 1998). The research questions guiding this study focused on the personal experiences and perspectives of the participants. They included the following:

1. How do Latino students perceive Advanced Placement courses?
2. What do Latino students identify as factors that have contributed to their decision to enroll or not enroll in AP courses?
3. What is the role of parents, teachers, and administrators in the enrollment of Latino students in AP courses?

Research Design

A research design based on qualitative methodology was selected for this study. Research used to describe discovery, inquiry, and interpretation requires a credible

notation of science when used to intellectually investigate the observations of social interactions, politics, and hierarchies. Denzin and Lincoln's introduction to qualitative research (2005) indicates that this particular method of research is much more complex than analyzing factual data as in statistics. Merriam (1998) describes qualitative research as "an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p.5). Moreover, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) identify qualitative research as "an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world" (p.3).

Additionally, characteristics that serve to describe identify meaning through qualitative research include the following (Merriam, 1998; Snape & Spencer, 2003):

1. Meaning is identified and created by evaluating the perspective of the participant (etic) though the researcher's perspective (emic).
2. The researcher is the key instrument in data collection and analysis and has the flexibility to respond and make adjustments based on the research situation.
3. Fieldwork is involved where the researcher physically investigates and observes behavior in a natural setting.
4. The research is based on inductive strategy to identify concepts or theories from data collected.
5. Descriptive analysis is used to communicate findings from the study.

Naturalistic inquiry is unique in that it is involves a constructivist paradigm for evaluating and interpreting data within a natural setting that emerges throughout the

research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.224) describe the tenets of naturalistic inquiry as:

1. The researcher begins with a focus that may change.
2. Theory is emergent.
3. Sampling is contingent and intended to maximize the data gathered.
4. Instrumentation is subjective and is intended to identify prominent themes.
5. Data is reviewed through inductive analysis to best determine sensible meaning.
6. Inquiry is divergent and therefore timing is undefined.
7. Budget and cost are unspecified.
8. End products other than increased knowledge are not specified.

In this research, it was important to understand the perspectives of individual students within the school setting to determine the perceptions that affect AP course enrollment. Since this research involved the various perspectives of individuals, the researcher was the key instrument for collecting and analyzing data. This provided an advantage to respond and adapt quickly to process and clarify data throughout the research process. As such, it was critical for the researcher to take a naturalistic inquiry approach that served to best determine and understand the identified factors that affect the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses.

The complexity of qualitative research provided the ability to review and attach meaning to observations, conversations, and inflections within this study which centered on social interactions and accommodations. The piecing and deduction of applied

knowledge to this research was taken further through triangulation which added a deeper understanding, richness, and breadth of knowledge in connecting the qualitative research to current and proposed practice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Additionally, the qualitative research approach taken for this study provided the science for turning subjective observations into scientific research data that provided reliable explanation to this study. Moreover, through the flexible methods applied in the qualitative research methodology, this study offers the credibility and fortitude to identify factors and/or consequences of AP policy and practice that ultimately affect the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses (Ritchie, 2003). In this study, the personal experiences and perspectives drawn from conversations and observations through interviews provided the unique and rich data to formulate conclusions and recommendations for informing and improving practice related to enrolling Latino students in AP classes. Conclusions and recommendations are discussed in Chapter V.

Research Study

Qualitative case studies in education are common as they provide much insight on educational practice. The qualitative case study is defined by the research process, unit of study, and its end product (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) states that determining a case study involves identifying the level of finiteness within the data collection. Further, Merriam (1998, p.29) defines the case study according to features such as:

1. Particularistic - focus is placed on a particular situation, program, or event.
2. Descriptive – data and findings are describes in a rich, “thick” manner.

3. Heuristic – explanation of findings promote deeper understanding and meaning.

Moreover, Merriam (1998, p.31) references Stake's description of case study knowledge in that the knowledge and understanding derived from a case study is more:

- Concrete and vivid as it resonates with our own experiences.
- Contextual and distinguishable.
- Developed and generalized through reader interpretation.
- Based on reference populations that facilitate extended generalizations.

Since this study involved identifying perspectives of students with regard to the specific program of Advanced Placement within a school, it was acceptable to consider a case study approach for this research. Moreover, the complexities of studying the personal perspectives, beliefs, and experiences of Latino students were best served through this qualitative case study. The research involved in this case study investigated the potential factors that preclude or encourage Latino enrollment in AP courses. The roles of parents, teachers, and administrators (including counselors) directly from the perspective of Latino students were also reviewed to determine their influence, if any, on Latino students deciding to or not enroll in AP courses. Since this case study centered on real life experiences and perspectives, the description of data collected is holistic and will promote future research development and influence educational practice with respect to improving enrollment in high school AP courses for Latino students.

Site Selection

For this case study, purposeful sampling was used to identify and select the study site. Lincoln & Guba (1985) describe “in purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations” (p.202). In selecting the site for this study, information on high school enrollment, urban location, performance, and courses offered including diversity of student body, success rates on AP exams, and number of AP courses offered was reviewed.

The site selected for this study was a large urban high school in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The high school that was selected, which will be referred to as Urban High School, is a comprehensive high school and has been recognized for its work in promoting and supporting a culture that emphasizes college and career readiness. Urban High School (UHS) has 2293 students enrolled in grades 9-12. The majority of students enrolled at UHS are identified as Hispanic at 77%. Other student groups include 9.6% African American, 9.5% White, 2.2% Asian, and .3% American Indian. Additionally, 80% of students enrolled at UHS are identified as Economically Disadvantaged, 23% LEP, and 62% At-Risk.

AP courses are offered in each of the core content areas at UHS. The number of AP courses offered include: ELA (2), Math (3), Science (3), Social Studies (7), LOTE (5), Technology Applications (1), and Fine Arts (5). Moreover, UHS has committed to offering a number of AP courses so as to encourage and increase overall student enrollment in AP courses. To assist in supporting the campus AP programs, UHS courses are also offers pre-AP courses at this campus. The number of pre-AP courses

offered include: ELA (3), Math (4), Science (3), Social Studies (3), LOTE (2).

Additionally, UHS has received recognition for its adoption and implementation of Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) courses. AVID courses are also offered for students in grades 9-12 and are recommended by the AVID site team which is mainly comprised of teachers that have completed training through the AVID certification program.

Although UHS offers AP courses in each content area, and is slightly above the state average with about 30% of students enrolled in AP courses, enrollment for Latino students is low as compared to the overall population and other student groups. Of students enrolled in AP courses, Hispanic students are underrepresented with only 28% enrolled in AP courses despite their majority enrollment at UHS of 77%. Other student groups enrolled in AP courses include Asian at 45%, 37% White, 14% American Indian, and African American at 25%. Over a 3 year comparison, this campus had steady increases in overall enrollment in AP courses with rates slightly above other campuses that offer AP courses in the same district and slightly below the state average by less than 1% (TEA, 2010a).

In addition to reviewing AP enrollment data for UHS, the percentage of students scoring a 3 or above on at least one AP exam was also reviewed and compared.

Although Latino students are underrepresented in AP course enrollment, the percentage of Latino students meeting AP exam criteria (score of 3 or above on at least one AP exam) was the second highest at 38% but below the state percentage of 50%. The percentage of AP exam criteria met for other student groups were 48.6% White, 33%

Asian, and 22% African American. The percentage of students identified as American Indian meeting exam criteria was not reported to protect the identity of students due to a small number of students in this group taking AP exams (TEA, 2010a).

With its diversity of student enrollment, small percentage of Latinos represented in AP courses, number of AP courses offered, percentage of students meeting AP exam criteria, and similarity to other comprehensive high schools in the area made UHS an ideal site for conducting this study. Moreover, for schools and districts that are committed to increasing the enrollment of Latino students in AP courses to match their overall student population, findings from this study conducted at this site will be relevant.

Participant Selection

According to Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003, p. 87), defining the selection requires addressing the following:

1. Which group is of interest to the subject of the study? Although the group may be obvious, consideration should be given to other groups that may offer a different perspective of the research question.
2. Are there subgroups within the central group that should be excluded because it would be inappropriate or insensitive to include them?
3. Are there other groups that could add contrasting views to the study?

Additionally, once the appropriate population group has been identified, Ritchie et al (2003) suggest that an appropriate sample frame must be selected (p.88). Sample frames can be either existing or generated sources. Existing sources include administrative

records, published lists, and survey samples. Generated sources include short interviews, organizational surveys, and snowballing or chain sampling (Ritchie et al, 2003).

As in the site selection method, purposeful sampling was used to identify participants for this study. Selection of participants for this case study included Latino students in grades 10-12 enrolled in high school advanced placement courses. Selected participants did not include Latino students that are recent immigrants. The snowball method was used to identify participants for this study. As such, selection of participants depended on recommendations from school counselors and was based on their enrollment in AP courses. All participants in this study were currently enrolled in high school AP courses at the time interviews were conducted. During the interview process, participants identified and recommended additional participants to participate in this study which added to the depth of data collected.

To identify and select students, contact was made with the campus principal to discuss the purpose of the study and process for recruiting and selecting participants. The selection of participants was to be random and dependent on students volunteering to participate so as to limit any bias in selecting candidates that might influence or skew findings. Additionally, it was considered that if students volunteered to participate in this study, they would be more open with their discussion and willing to share personal experiences related to their enrollment in AP courses. To assist in communicating the particulars of this study, the campus principal asked that the lead counselor for the campus make arrangements for announcing the study to students and collecting names of interested participants. A flyer announcing and advertising this study along with a

scheduled date to meet with the principal investigator was also provided to students. Through this process, 16 students were identified to participate in this study. Shortly after, a meeting to discuss the details of this study to participants was conducted by the principal investigator. In this meeting, the principal investigator shared the research problem, purpose of the study, and implications for informing policy and practice with participants. Participants were told that there was no compensation for their participation but that the benefit was that their shared experiences would help identify factors that influence enrollment in AP classes for Latino students. At this same meeting, interested participants were provided with parent permission forms and asked that they return them signed within one week if they chose to participate. All signed permission forms were submitted to the lead counselor. After the permission forms were received a list with student names, grade, contact information and AP courses each student was enrolled in was compiled. Once permission forms were received, the principal investigator contacted students by phone to schedule individual interviews. Out of the 16 participants contacted and scheduled for interviews, 6 participants showed for their scheduled interviews. During these interviews, participants were asked if they could recommend other students to participate in this study. 4 additional students were identified by their peers as potential participants and contacted to schedule interviews bringing the total number of students interviewed to 10. Individual interviews were scheduled at the students' convenience after school hours so as to avoid conflicting with their class schedules. Interview locations were also held at a location convenient to the participants and included the high school site and nearby middle school.

Data Collection

The collection of data in qualitative research is critical in generating meaning and developing an understanding of the factors that promote or hinder the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses. The primary methods for collecting data in qualitative research include observation and conversation analysis through in-depth interviews. Further, deciding to conduct interviews depends largely on the depth and complexity of data and topics sought as well as the characteristics of the research group (Lewis, 2003). According to Lewis (2003), in-depth interviews offer depth as they provide valuable information about the individual's personal experiences and perspective. Additionally, in-depth interviews focus on personal experiences and are more accessible and convenient for participants. Personal interviews also promote a safe environment for discussion and participants are less likely to be inhibited to discuss personal experiences and perspectives (Lewis, 2003). As such, the interview process has the potential to provide rich, descriptive data about perceptions about AP courses and experiences with AP enrollment. This study relied on interviews and discussion with individual Latino students selected from within the context of this research study for the purpose of extending personal perspectives and experiences with systems of enrollment in high school AP courses.

Interviews conducted in this study were semi-structured that allowed for flexible, open-ended questions that could be explored and adjusted according to emerging ideas or topics (Merriam, 1998). Data from interviews was collected through digital recording and note-taking to ensure thorough and proper data analysis. The digital recordings of

interviews and discussions were then transcribed to assure completeness, understanding, reliability, and opportunity for review and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Analysis

Spencer, Ritchie, and O'Connor (2003) describe data analysis as a “challenging and exciting stage of the qualitative research process” (p.199). Merriam (1998) states that, “data analysis is the process of making sense of the data” (p. 178). Moreover, the process of data analysis involves a continuous cycle of interpreting and reviewing data to determine meaning and identify findings from the study (Merriam, 1998). The core of the qualitative research study is the data analysis based on the data derived from interviews to define the significance of the research. Converting the qualitative data from all sources, such as interviews, into data that could connect with research and theory was critical in determining a recommendation that would contribute to the overall field of study related to policy and practice that affects the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses. “Inductive data analysis may be defined most simply as a process for ‘making sense’ of field data” (Lincoln & Guba, p.202). Once the raw data was gathered according to the research design, an inductive process was utilized to organize the data. Through this process, data was inductively coded and categorized for the purpose of “unitizing” raw data to “systematically transform and aggregate it into units which permitted a description of relevant content characteristics” (Lincoln & Guba, p.203). The information drawn out from this process of unitizing was sorted into more descriptive categories so as to infer about the context of implications of policy and practice affecting the enrollment of Latino students in high school advanced placement courses.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is legitimized by the process of testing the reliability and validity of data collected from within a social context. Determining trustworthiness is critical and is concerned with “reaching assessments of confirmability, dependability, and as an optional feature, providing an external check on steps taken in relation to credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, p.323). Merriam (1998) discusses basic strategies for enhancing internal validity or reality matching in qualitative research. Of the strategies discussed, this study utilized triangulation, member checks, and peer examination. According to Ritchie (2003), “triangulation involves the use of different methods and resources to check the integrity of, or extend, inferences drawn from the data” and is a means of “investigating the convergence of data and conclusions” (p.43). Triangulation required that data gathered be measured accordingly within the various data sources such as participant interview responses and discussion topics and generalizations. Member checking involved participants reviewing accuracy of data collected and interpreted (Merriam, 1998). Participants were asked to reflect on and review their responses about their experiences with the systems that affect enrollment in AP courses in schools. Finally, to establish further credibility, peer review and debriefing was utilized. Peer review and debriefing, “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (Lincoln & Guba, p.308), provided a means for engaging in formal and informal discussions with

colleagues about the data collected from individual interviews with student participants (Merriam, 1998).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors contributing to AP enrollment rates for Latino students in high school. The process in this case study allowed for analyzing the individual experiences with and perceptions of AP courses that influence Latino students in their decision to enroll and participate in advanced placement courses in high school. The research methodology for this study was discussed as an approach that is centered on a qualitative case study. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were described and identified as the critical feature within this case study so as to allow for flexibility and opportunities for further exploration of topics or ideas that emerged from the research. Finally, trustworthiness of this study was discussed emphasizing triangulation, member checks, and peer review to assure reliability and validity.

Chapter IV

Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present and analyze the findings of this study. Findings are based on qualitative data collected from individual student interviews which allowed for understanding the personal perspectives and experiences with the advanced placement program in a high school. As such, findings from these interviews identified factors that influence the enrollment of Latino students in advanced placement courses in high school.

Also included in this chapter will be common themes derived from an analysis of student responses and perspectives that will also serve to identify the roles of stakeholders that influence or discourage Latino students in enrolling in advanced placement courses and promote future research development, and influence educational practice with respect to improving access to advanced placement courses in schools

Introduction

Advanced placement courses are designed to be innovative and rigorous and also encourage and promote critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. Currently, most high schools across the United States offer advanced placement courses with the intent that students enrolled in such courses will be prepared for entering and completing college courses. While advanced placement courses are intended to promote enriched learning experiences for all students, Latino student enrollment in advanced placement courses in high schools is low as compared to other student groups excluding African American students (College Board, 2010). College Board has remained committed to

promoting equity and access to advanced placement courses. Additionally, school districts and high schools have adopted open enrollment policies and implemented programs and initiatives aimed at encouraging and supporting student enrollment in advanced placement courses. However, Latino student enrollment in advanced placement courses in high schools remains low as compared to the majority of students enrolled (College Board, 2010). Despite reports, studies, and literature surrounding equity and access in the advanced placement program, research and literature is limited with respect to identifying factors that influence the enrollment in advanced placement courses in high schools from the perspective of Latino students.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that influence Latino students in their decision to enroll and participate in advanced placement courses in high schools. Moreover, identifying factors that influence enrollment in advanced placement courses from the perspective of the Latino student will be critical to analyzing current practice and informing future strategies for increasing enrollment in high school advanced placement courses.

This qualitative case study was intended to provide rich, descriptive data drawn from student experiences and perceptions from individual interviews that allowed for flexibility and opportunities for further exploration of topics or ideas that emerged from the research. In this study, it was important to understand the individual perspectives of the students to best identify the factors that influence enrollment in advanced placement courses. As such, a naturalistic inquiry approach involving a constructivist paradigm for

evaluating and interpreting data was applied throughout this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, the researcher was the key instrument in collecting and analyzing the interview data, so as to process and clarify the collected data and make adjustments quickly throughout the study. This approach allowed for participants to be more candid and open with sharing their perceptions and perspectives about advanced placement courses and factors that affect Latino enrollment in advanced placement courses in high schools.

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

In this study there were several significant themes derived from these guiding research questions:

1. How do Latino students perceive Advanced Placement courses?
2. What do Latino students identify as factors that have contributed to their decision to enroll or not enroll in AP courses?
3. What is the role of parents, teachers, and administrators in the enrollment of Latino students in AP courses?

The findings from the interviews conducted will be presented for each of the guiding research questions followed by a discussion of emergent themes as factors that ultimately affect Latino enrollment in advanced placement courses in high school.

Research Question 1:

How do Latino students perceive AP courses?

In this first question it was important to know how Latino students first perceive AP courses. In identifying their perceptions of AP courses, it would assist in developing

an understanding of whether or not students first knew of AP courses but also how they connected these courses to their high school learning experience. Emergent themes from this first question include advanced placement courses perceived as (1) a gateway to college, (2) elite, and (3) a pathway to success.

A Gateway to College

Every participant in this study indicated that advanced placement courses were considered an important factor in entering college. Moreover, according to participants, if a student does not take advanced placement courses, they are thought of as less likely to be accepted into a college. In discussing the perception of AP courses as a gateway into college, additional themes or “sub-themes” emerged. Within the overarching theme of AP courses perceived as a gateway into college, students also identified that these courses are primarily perceived as courses that (1) promote and support college readiness, (2) emphasize study skills for college, and (3) provide an opportunity to earn college credit while enrolled in high school. Additionally, participants were confident that by deciding to enroll in advanced placement courses they would receive better instruction from teachers that would challenge them to perform at their best and be better prepared for entering and completing college.

College readiness

In the discussion of AP courses perceived as a gateway into college, participants also described that AP courses promoted college readiness as they were thought to be more challenging and rigorous. According to participants, they believed that AP courses require students to complete projects, participate in discussion, and read and write more

than in the “regular” classes. Moreover, participants resounded that before enrolling in AP courses they considered AP courses to be more challenging and understood that they would be required to work harder than in their “regular” classes. More importantly, participants noted that by deciding to enroll in AP courses, they would be better prepared for college. In describing AP courses as more challenging and rigorous, one participant, Hector Robles stated that:

I actually have to think now! In the regular classes, all you need to do is fill out a worksheet or write a simple essay and you’re done! Not in these classes. You actually have to do more thinking. I like it better than doing a worksheet. The regular classes are way too easy. In AP, when you work on a problem, you have to find a solution, but you also need to discuss it and argue your case. You just can’t come up with an answer. You need to be ready to talk about it.

Similarly, in describing AP courses as more challenging than “regular” classes, Joe Hernandez stated:

AP will make you think more. It offers a different perspective, you’re able to see beyond typical work you do in other classes. In AP classes, the teachers ask you thought provoking questions. They [teachers] always ask you to say a little more. Sometimes it makes my head hurt! But I’m ok with it.

Another student, Jennifer Lopez stated:

The AP courses are much harder and require that you have outside knowledge. The work I have to do in my AP classes is more challenging and I have to think outside of the box a lot.

In her description of advanced placement courses, Jennifer also connected the importance of AP classes and college preparedness. She commented:

I know that even though the AP classes are harder I still want to take them because they will benefit me in my future. I think that it will be better for college because we're not focused on TAKS. I mean, we're doing more hands-on learning and learning how to apply what we've learned.

Participant Holly Garcia cited that general classes were not perceived to be as challenging as AP courses and less likely to lead to being accepted into the college of her choice. Holly stated:

I would see my friends that were in AP classes and the work they were doing that looked more interesting and challenging. In the general classes it just seemed like I wasn't learning anything. Some of that stuff I already knew so I figured I should take the initiative to go to harder classes because I knew it would look better on a college application especially for getting scholarships and things of that sort.

Additionally, participants also believed that if they were unable to meet the more rigorous expectations and/or fulfill the course requirements, they would be transferred out of the AP courses. The thought of not taking AP courses and thus the possibility of not being able to enter or succeed in college motivated the students to perform at their best in these classes and continuously seek teacher support and tutoring as often as necessary. One participant, Edward Mata described the importance of staying focused and seeking assistance as:

When you're in AP classes, you have to adapt to the work teachers give you and you must know what is going on. Otherwise if you don't, you'll get lost. So you have to match the effort, I mean, you have to have good study habits and be o.k. to work in groups. There is a lot of effort outside of the class.

Another participant also discussed the importance of being persistent so that they met the rigor and demand of AP courses. Jose Angel said:

When you're in these classes, you need more patience and understanding or else you'll give up.

Meeting the requirements and learning expectations for AP courses was especially important for students as they considered this an important factor in remaining enrolled in these courses. Participants commonly perceived that if they could not meet the required demands, they would be withdrawn from the course and in essence, have a lowered opportunity for college entrance and success.

Study habits for college

When students described their perception of AP courses as critical to entering and succeeding in college, they identified that these courses promote study habits and skills necessary for meeting expectations. Edward Mata stated:

In AP there is so much to do but there is a lot of help in AP. The teachers help you learn about good study habits. When you are in these classes, you have to learn how to study. I mean you have to pay attention in class, take notes, and then read and write a lot. Then at home I would read the book by myself and then students were surprised that I would get higher grades. It wasn't that I was

necessarily gifted naturally, it was just I knew what it took to be successful beforehand, and that's what really just drove me to do well.

Participant Jennifer Lopez discussed that through her AP classes, she learned how to better prepare for her classes. She stated:

I learned new ways of reading, like reading between the lines and stuff like that. I mean I was able to better understand what I was reading and then apply it to my other classes. I think that what I was learning in AP really helped me do better. At first it was hard, but then after I got the hang of it, it made my classes easier. In college I'll need to read a lot so I think this is gonna help me.

Several participants commented that they did not have very good study skills prior to enrolling in AP courses. They also recognized that unlike their AP courses, they had not been required to study or be prepared for their regular classes. Additionally, the students also considered that AP courses would better prepare them for college since they were learning the skills needed to study and prepare for AP courses. Most importantly, students considered study habits as an important component in their preparation for and success in college.

Earning college credit

In discussing their perception of AP courses, participants identified that earning college credit while in high school could be a determinant factor in entering college. Considering college acceptance as competitive, participants believed that they would be more likely to be selected if they took AP courses and met AP exam standards for college credit. Hector Robles stated that:

As long as I pass my AP classes, I know that I can save money by passing my test and earn college credit. And, I also know that I will be a better student because of it.

Participant Frank Torres considered that earning college credit and being better prepared for college courses were key stating:

The courses will prepare you for college. They teach you topics that will help you in college. If you do your best and take the test you can get college credit.

In deciding to enroll in AP courses, Edward Mata considered that earning college credit while in high school would be an important reason to enroll. He said:

I had friends in AP classes and heard that you could get college credit. When I was in middle school, I remember my counselors talking to my parents about how I could get college credit by taking AP Spanish. The other thing they said was that this could help since college was expensive, I could earn credit in school and not have to take the classes in college. This would save my parents money for college.

Each participant in this study perceived that AP courses were an important factor in preparing for and entering college. Moreover, participants believed AP courses to be a gateway into college. They considered that AP courses were more challenging than general classes and required that they spend more time studying. Thus, participants believed that they would be better prepared to succeed in college. Additionally, by taking AP courses and taking the AP exams successfully, students could earn college credit

which participants believed would provide them with an advantage in successfully entering college.

AP courses perceived as elite

In describing their perceptions of AP courses, participants in this study considered that these courses are thought of as elite and for students that are in gifted programs. Additionally, participants believed that AP courses are for “good” students that want to learn and go to college. Consequently, AP courses are not perceived to be available to all students. Rather, AP courses are identified as courses where only those students with a college trajectory and serious about meeting course expectations are accepted. While the participants in this study thought of themselves as “good” students, the majority did not believe that they were perceived as gifted students with a chance at entering college. Moreover, participants in this study believed that AP courses were intended for other students and not them. Participant Frank Torres recalled:

When I was in middle school, I remember hearing about AP classes from the counselors, but I didn’t think they were thinking about me taking those classes. I figured that those classes were for kids that were going to college. I just didn’t think that I was one of those kids.

Edward Mata noted:

My teachers usually recruited students to get into AP [classes]. I had heard that the teachers would let you know if you could get into AP. If they didn’t tell you about AP, that pretty much meant that you probably weren’t smart enough to get into AP.

Similarly, another participant, Richard Ramirez perceived that AP courses were not for all students stating:

AP wasn't offered for everyone. It was only for the smart kids. At least that's what I thought. It wasn't something that was brought up to me. You knew that other kids were recommended for AP by teachers, but that wasn't something that I thought would be for me.

For participant, Joe Hernandez, AP classes were considered to be special and not available to all students. He stated:

I remember when I first entered high school the kids in AP were seen as the smart ones. It was something that my friends and I talked about as wanting to be. It was something that was not available to everyone. It was something prestigious. If you were smart, good kid, then you were encouraged to take AP classes. Since no one [adult] talked about AP to students, no one knew how to get in. So when you saw these kids in these classes, you were like oh wow, they got in. They must be really smart! The regular classes were seen as for 'rejects' or students that are slower or in special programs like ESL, jocks, or 'bad' kids. So when it was time to think about next classes, my friends and I decided that since we had done well in other classes that maybe we could be part of that smart group. We wanted to challenge ourselves, but we wanted to be part of the prestigious group. We decided together and since we thought we were smart, we figured we could do the class. The funny thing was that we thought we were gonna be told that we couldn't get in, so we just thought that if they said we couldn't then it wasn't a big

deal. But they didn't, they were like ok with it. That's when the counselors looked at our grades from other classes and told us which AP courses we should take. So then we were like all right, we got in!

Participant, Hector Robles connected a significant event in his elementary school experience that shaped his perception of AP courses as elite and intended for select students. He stated:

When you are in AP, you're in the big leagues! AP is not for everyone, I mean usually it's for the ones in GT classes. In 4th grade I tried being in GT classes because my parents were like yeah, go for it and so I told myself yeah, I'll try it. I was really hoping I could get in and I didn't. I was close to getting into the GT classes and because of that, it was in 4th grade and I felt awful. I was like man! You know people said 'oh, Hector is that smart guy! But I didn't feel smart because I wasn't in GT. Then I remember when I was in 5th grade the GT students were kinda they were their own people. I wasn't part of that because usually all you saw was uh, Americans, African Americans, Asians, and the Hispanics that were there they were white, they were white Hispanics not Hispanics and I didn't feel like I was part of that group. So those were the ones that would be in AP.

Through his recollection Hector identified a key point in AP courses considered to be elite and exclusive to select students. Moreover, what is also important to note is that for Hector, this perception was developed as early as the fourth grade.

Pathway to success

While participants considered that AP courses are linked to college entrance and success, they also perceived that AP courses could determine success in life. While this perception was largely based on entering and successfully completing college, participants noted that the type of work required of them would also improve their confidence and speaking skills which they recognized would be important in a career. Additionally, participants noted that they considered AP courses to be influential in their future success. Participant, Joe Hernandez noted that:

AP classes will help one to be successful in school and in life. I mean since the work is beyond high school, we get to learn skills that are relevant to what we want to do later in life. Since I want to be an engineer, I know that the work I am doing in AP will help me do that. If I were in regular classes, I probably would be focusing on TAKS instead of stuff I need to know for my career. It's not easy, but I don't think engineering is easy either. The work I do in AP is a lot of complicated math problems, more complex, and more real world. And then there are a lot of projects. So to be in these classes, there is a lot of time and effort and you need to pay attention to what you're doing. So I think I'll be ready.

Richard Ramirez described that the structure and academic demands found in AP courses are critical to future success in college and career. Additionally, as compared to AP classes, the requirements in general education classes in high schools are minimal and not considered to be critical to achieving success in college and in career. Richard stated:

In AP, it's more fun and interesting. You're learning stuff that not everyone is learning in the rest of the school. You're learning special stuff that is harder.

Teachers are teaching at a higher level with college expectations. You have to think, analyze, and solve problems where in regular classes you just go to class, listen, take a test, and then move on. Basically, in regular classes you're just doing the requirements to graduate but not necessarily for college and a career.

In describing how AP courses led to success, Richard also stated that "in AP, there is more writing and you have to be ready to speak or do presentations. I think that it's helped me get into clubs and UIL which will help me later on." For participant, Edward Mata, future career options and a motivation to learn more than what was generally offered were important connections in AP courses. Edward also recognized that to accelerate his learning of English, he considered that AP courses would require him to be a better reader and writer and thus support his success in learning English. Edward stated:

Well, as an AP student, I guess what really drove me was being successful. But I know sometimes it's getting a higher GPA or getting like good grades. It's really a good incentive. But sometimes, it was more rewarding to know more, and also you get more knowledge sometimes, and it prepares you, and sometimes like for English, wasn't my first language, but I mean, I always wanted to be more knowledgeable with books and literature and so taking it, I was really happy. I took it and it made me a better writer. Given more career options, more career choices, I mean, I was more attentive and conscious on what was going on around

me. I mean, if you take like an AP course, you could know more about your career choices and options you could take later in life.

For participant Jennifer Lopez, taking AP courses also meant that she would be better prepared to take the College Board SAT exam and in essence more likely to earn the score she needs for successful college entrance. Additionally AP courses could lead to success in general. Jennifer stated that “AP prepares you for college, College Board exams, and for situations in life in general like government and politics.”

Research Question 2:

What do Latino students identify as factors that have contributed to their decision to enroll or not enroll in AP courses?

This research question was important in identifying factors that preclude Latino students from enrolling in AP courses in high school. Identifying such factors from the perspective of Latino students themselves would serve to best inform schools and districts on current practice that limits and/or encourages enrollment in AP courses. Overall, participants did not cite particular barriers that would have preclude them from enrolling in AP classes. Rather, participants in this study identified several key factors that influenced their decision to enroll in AP courses in high school. In their decision to enroll in AP courses, participants credited (1) teachers, (2) the structure and expectations of AP courses, and (3) enrollment in AP support programs such as AVID and pre-AP as key deciding factors. In their decision to not enroll in AP courses, participants cited (1) limited information about AP courses and (2) an absence of advocacy as reasons for not enrolling in AP courses.

Deciding to enroll in AP courses

Teachers

Participants credited teachers as the most critical factor in deciding to enroll in AP courses in high school. Participants also cited others such as friends, counselors, and parents in influencing their decision to enroll in AP courses. However, for all participants, teachers were the key in first learning about AP courses and understanding the requirements and expectations for the course. Additionally, teachers provided information on AP courses and encouraged students to consider the benefits of enrolling AP courses including college preparedness and earning college credit. For participants Edward Mata, Hector Robles, Holly Garcia, and Jennifer Lopez, teachers recognized their potential for success and were persistent in encouraging them to enroll in AP courses and begin planning for college and career.

Edward Mata credited his learning of AP courses from his high school teachers and indicated that teachers would recruit and encourage students to enroll in AP courses. He stated:

I first learned of AP courses through the basic seminars from teachers wanting to recruit other people and at the same time also learned it by PowerPoint because teachers would always give handouts to us and say ‘this is AP, it’s a new program. It prepares you for college. It can potentially give you college credit’ and they would even say, ‘Even if you didn’t get any college credit by the AP exam, you’d at least be aware of some things and topics that you’d encounter later at your college years.’”

Edward also stated:

Well, personally, they (teachers) can target them (students) because I was actually overlooked because I was actually really quiet and really silent during middle school and it wasn't until my English teacher who realized that I have a great potential as a writer and a great potential in what I saw in life, and so she encouraged me to get into GT program as an eighth grader which is something that's really rare. They constantly tell me that I was good at writing and good at my perception of life. So I mean, if it wasn't for her, then I probably wouldn't be in GT or prepared myself for AP.

Similarly, Joe Hernandez discussed that he first learned of AP courses through a middle school teacher. He stated:

Early on it was the teachers that were telling you what it was and what you would experience later on as you took more classes. They would say look at those pre-AP classes and not regulars. They kind of want to push you to be in it. So, it was more like the teachers are telling what it was, what are you going to experience in the next weeks as opposed to in your later years.

Participant Holly Garcia noted that teachers selected students from their classes to recommend to counselors for AP classes. He stated "if you were interested in learning, the teachers would pull you aside and talk about pre-AP and AP. They targeted motivated students and pushed them into AP." For participant Hector Robles, his English teacher's persistence motivated him to enroll in AP courses. Hector recalled that his teacher did not give up on him enrolling in AP courses and had involved his parent by the

fourth time she had asked Hector to enroll in AP English. In his recollection, Hector stated:

My teachers just said you could do it! I think that if you give the person a choice, they might not take it. What's funny is that the first semester the teacher kept asking me, 'get into AP. You have good work ethic. That's the one thing about me, I work hard. And she told me you're a good student, you work hard you belong in AP. She asked me three times and each time I said 'no' because I just didn't feel that I could do it. I knew Spanish and Psych pretty well and thought I could do those classes, but not AP English. I think in Spanish so I knew I could do that, no problem. But I kept saying no. But the fourth time she asked my dad in front of me and she explained how the college, they really like those things. And then my dad explained the money situation that if I wanted to go to college it would have to be a scholarship because if it wasn't a scholarship I would be at Northlake (community college). And so after talking to her my dad didn't tell me you have to do this, he just said it would be good if you did it. But the thing that motivated me about getting into the class was that they focused on what I was good at and told me I would be fine.

Jennifer Lopez shared a similar experience where one of her teachers recognized that she had potential and that she should consider enrolling in AP courses. Jennifer shared:

My Humanities teacher would always talk to me about getting into AP and encouraged me to get in. That gave me the motivation to try, so I talked to my counselor about getting in. I still keep in contact with that teacher.

In deciding to enroll in AP classes in high school, participants cited that teachers were their primary source of motivation and encouragement. Participants commented that generally, teachers communicated information about AP to all students. However, what made the difference in the participants' decision to enroll in AP was that their teachers made an intentional effort in encouraging them individually. Most participants in this study indicated that they had not intended to enroll in AP classes but that their teachers' support and guidance made the difference in their eventual decision to take such courses.

Course Structure and expectations

In deciding to enroll in AP courses, participants in this study referenced the structure and expectations of AP courses as a factor in their decision. Describing regular classes as disruptive, irrelevant to college readiness, and focused on testing, participants indicated that they preferred the rigor and challenge found in AP courses.

Jennifer Lopez described her experience in regular classes as basic and inadequate to prepare her for college and career. She stated:

The work is very basic in regular classes. A lot of times what I noticed throughout the year back when I wasn't in AP classes, basically it was all preparation for TAKS. Pretty much in regular classes, this is what's gonna be on TAKS and this is what you need to know. So the class itself is very basic in preparing you for a test rather than outside knowledge you will use.

Instead, Jennifer preferred the structure of the AP courses where they emphasized collaboration, group projects, and discussion. Jennifer was motivated to enroll in AP

courses after seeing the work her friends (already enrolled in AP classes) were doing.

Once enrolled in AP classes, Jennifer noticed a significant difference and added:

AP classes are more peaceful. Despite the workload that we have, we have more leeway in our classes. They tell us at the beginning of the year, 'you're an AP student so we expect you to act like one so don't disrupt the class because they'll take you out of the class as fast as they put you in. Don't be afraid to ask for help or anything, but we're here to do work. We're here to prepare you for life in general.' So as long as you're there to do work, you have more leeway and that's why I think it's more peaceful. We can help one another out. If we have a question we can ask another peer and then ask the teacher. We're allowed to work more with each other. Unlike in regular classes, it's usually just teacher and student, you don't get a chance to work with your peers and discuss your ideas. Then again they (students in general classes) don't have the same work that we do so I guess that's why.

Jennifer also referenced the opportunity to approach learning differently as a key factor in her deciding to enroll in AP classes. She stated:

We get to work in group circles where you read a novel and we would discuss what we found and then collaborate our ideas to get the big picture. In AP classes you have more freedom to work on projects, assignments because they want us to think outside the box, but you can't think outside of the box if they won't let you out of the box.

In discussing their perceptions of AP courses as courses that promoted college readiness through college level work and emphasized non-traditional and project based learning, participants also attributed these same characteristics as factors in their decision to enroll in AP courses. Participants noted that since general classes were not challenging and emphasized discipline over learning, participants were motivated to participate in AP courses as they offered a more rigorous and relevant experience involving group collaboration, self-paced study, relevant and interesting learning topics, application of technology.

Enrollment in AP support programs

In this study, most participants cited that their enrollment in pre-AP classes in middle and high school also influenced their decision to enroll in AP courses in high school. Participants referenced pre-AP courses as honors classes that typically required teacher recommendation and approval. They are also referred to as GT classes and limited to students in such a program. While participants noted that they had not originally been recommended for pre-AP courses, teachers quickly recognized their potential and encouraged them to speak to counselors about enrollment. Other participants identifying Spanish as their first language attributed their enrollment in middle school AP Spanish as a key factor in their enrollment in additional AP courses.

Pre-AP courses in middle school served as a foundational experience for students deciding to enroll in AP courses in high school. Participants generally described that while enrolled in pre-AP classes, they were expected to engage in challenging work similar to what would be required in AP courses in high school. The work they were

expected to do involved group projects, extensive written work, and numerous reading assignments.

Enrollment in AP Spanish courses while in middle school provided students with the motivation to pursue other AP courses in high school. Participants noted that while enrolled in AP Spanish, they were expected to engage in more challenging work that involved numerous individual and group projects, study sessions on Saturdays, and take the AP exam. As a result of these experiences, all but one participant noted that by taking AP Spanish in middle school, they were better prepared and motivated to take additional AP courses in high school. Participants also added that their level of fluency in Spanish prior to enrolling in AP Spanish may have served as a contributing factor in their decision to enroll in the course.

Although participant Hector Robles had been denied admission into the GT program in elementary school, he, a native Spanish speaker, was encouraged to enroll in AP Spanish while enrolled in middle school. After successfully completing the AP Spanish course and exam in middle school, Hector decided to continue enrolling in additional AP Spanish courses in high school. His success also prompted him to consider other AP courses that he might not have considered had he not had the experience with AP Spanish. Hector stated:

In 8th grade, our counselors met with students to talk about the classes we needed and looked over the recommendation sheet. Then they told me that I should take the test for AP Spanish. It was easy. I think it was because I knew Spanish already. So I was in this class in 8th grade. But when I was going to 9th grade, the

counselor made a mistake. She put me in Spanish II instead of AP Spanish. But, then my teacher noticed that I needed to be in AP Spanish so that's how I got back in. All my other classes were pre-AP. Then in 11th grade is when my English teacher recommended me for AP English. I didn't think I could do it, but she wouldn't give up on me.

Edward Mata discussed his early experience with AP courses when he was encouraged to take AP Spanish since he was fluent in Spanish. He recalled:

When I was in middle school my counselor told me about taking AP Spanish so I decided to take the test to get in. I passed it and got in the class. Also, my GT [gifted and talented] teacher would talk about getting into AP classes once we got into high school.

Deciding not to enroll in AP courses

The participants in this study were all actively enrolled in AP courses. However, participants discussed factors that influenced their initial decision to not enroll in AP courses. Overwhelmingly, participants indicated that information about AP courses was minimal and seemed limited to a word of mouth process. Participants also noted that while information was mostly communicated by teachers, information was at best general and vague with no defined process in how students are able to enroll in AP courses. Additionally, participants identified that advocacy for AP enrollment is limited and largely dependent on teachers recognizing student potential and preparedness for AP courses and college readiness.

Limited information

While participants had a general view of the expectations, challenges, and benefits of taking AP courses in high school, they admitted that they were interested, but with limited information on the enrollment process, they did not know how to enroll in such courses. This lack of information coupled with AP courses perceived as limited to few students. Consequently, participants did not initially consider enrolling in AP courses.

Edward Mata discussed that he had intended to enroll in AP courses but that without the information he needed or knowing who to go to he would not enroll in AP courses. He stated:

I knew that I wanted to get into AP because of what I had heard about being able to get into college, but I didn't know what I needed to do or if I could get in. The counselors had limited information about AP courses. There wasn't much out there about which classes or requirements to get in. I know that other students also struggled to know how to get into the classes.

Edward also stated that:

Students need to know what AP is and other ways they can be successful. A lot of the time, students have to find out more on their own. They want to get in but it stops at the how. Others want to get in [AP] but how?

Similarly, another student Frank Torres described his experience of being encouraged to plan for college but not certain of what he needed to do stating:

Because like, based from my personal experiences as a student, our principal really pushed for college and so did my teachers and counselors. I mean that's what you hear in school. So it's really up to us to make sure what we're getting ourselves into and it's up to us to actually like work for ourselves because we come in school and then our parents who haven't actually gone to college, so with them, it sounds like get into college, get into college, get into college, but when you're actually in high school, you're like, ok, I wanna get into college, but you stop at how. How do I prepare myself? What are ways I can start now as opposed to later because with me, it's more like because I was already disadvantaged, it was up to me to try even harder, so when it was up to me to go to college, I knew I would need to be if not equal or greater than other students.

Lack of advocacy

The absence of student advocates and mentors that could encourage enrollment in AP courses was another factor in participants deciding not to enroll in AP courses. Participants identified that while teachers served an important role in their decision to enroll in AP courses, they also determined that without advocacy, not all students have a real opportunity to enroll in AP courses in high school. Moreover, enrollment in AP courses for students especially Latino students is largely dependent on teacher recommendation and thus unintentional.

Participant Richard Ramirez discussed that since AP courses were not necessarily offered to all students during registration, he did not consider requesting AP courses. Additionally, he stated that while he knew of AP courses, “no one ever brought it up to me. I just figured that since they (counselors) didn’t say anything to me then that meant I wasn’t an AP student. So I didn’t even ask.” Similarly, Joe Hernandez shared his experience,

No one knew how to get in. No one talked about AP to students and counselors only reviewed your classes to make sure you were in the right ones. If you were a smart, good kid, then you were told to take AP classes.

Hector Robles commented that:

There are smart kids that are held back from participating in AP because there isn’t anyone there to motivate them. Honestly, if all students were enrolled in AP, there would be less problems. They [students] would do good things and stay out of trouble because they would be challenged and think that what they’re doing will help them get into college.

Another participant, Frank Torres stated:

Latino students see challenge versus opportunity. I mean they get discouraged when there isn’t anyone there to encourage you to do better. If teachers connected to students and showed them how AP is important for college, I think that more students would enroll in AP. They need to be more interactive with students and get to know students more so that they motivate us to take more challenging classes. Since I was in AVID, my AVID teacher would always talk

about college and what we needed to do to get there and how it would help me get a career.

In general, participants identified that a lack of advocacy in promoting AP course enrollment was a significant factor in not considering AP courses in high school.

Whereas in some instances, students may specifically opt out of participating or enrolling in high school courses, AP course enrollment is typically not even considered an option.

As such, despite having an interest in such courses, limited information about the enrollment process for AP, and few student advocates, students do not consider enrollment as an option and thus decide not to enroll in high school AP courses.

Research Question 3:

What is the role of parents, teachers, and administrators in the enrollment of Latino students in AP courses?

Determining the role that parents, teachers, and administrators have in the enrollment of Latino students is significant to best identify areas for improvement and continuance.

Parents

In the discussion of the parents' role in the enrollment of Latino students in AP courses, participants did not indicate that their parents had a significant influence in their enrolment in AP courses. However, participants did praise and credit their parents for supporting them and encouraging them in school. Moreover, participants knew that their parents wanted the best for them and had expectations that they have an opportunity to attend college. Participants also recognized that their parents trusted that their children

were enrolled in the best courses that would lead them to college. Participants considered that limited information and understanding of high school AP courses and college requisites constrained and affected their parents' role in advocating their enrollment in AP classes. More importantly, with this limited perspective of AP courses, parents did not encourage nor demand that their children take such courses. However, parents were supportive of participants enrolling in AP courses especially after teachers stressed that AP courses could help support college readiness, acceptance, and success.

Edward Mata attributed his parents' limited role in his decision to enroll in AP courses to that of not understanding how such courses could significantly influence his college trajectory. Edward identified that if his parents knew the real implications for taking AP courses, they would have had a more significant role in his decision. Edward stated:

I didn't have a lot of support from home. My parents didn't push for college. They had not gone to college, so they couldn't really talk to me about this. My parents only would say 'just do well'. They didn't know what the difference was in my work. They just wanted to know if it was good or not. I think that if my parents knew how important it [AP] was to get into college, I think that they would have probably pushed me more.

Similarly, Hector Robles stated "when I wanted to be in AP classes, I remember my dad saying yeah, go for it. My dad just said, 'do well.' Jennifer Lopez stated that her parents encouraged her participation in AP and that they were proud of her for being in those classes.

Teachers

The role of teachers was cited as the most important factor in the participants' decision to enroll in AP courses. Participants stated that their decision to enroll in AP courses was largely the result of teachers taking a special interest in them and encouraging them to take more challenging courses. They also stated that teachers recognized their performance and work ethic as important reasons for suggesting that they enroll in AP courses. Additionally, participants alluded that without their teachers recognizing their potential, they likely would not have considered AP courses since they identified such courses as intended for students other than themselves. Conversely, if teachers are unfamiliar with the importance and benefit of AP courses for students or do not identify student potential, enrollment in such courses is hindered.

Edward Mata described how his teacher recognized his potential and encouraged him to enroll in an AP course. Moreover, if his teacher had not encouraged him to take the AP course, he likely would not have enrolled. He stated:

I was almost overlooked because I was quiet. But I was great at writing, so my teacher knew that I could do the work. So my teacher encouraged me to go into AP English. But I think that if she hadn't noticed my writing I probably would not have taken the AP class. So I think that teachers need to know the strengths of all their students and encourage their students to get into AP classes.

Hector Robles also stated:

My teachers thought I could do honors classes. They told me I could do it. My English teacher told me that I belonged in AP because I was a hard worker. She

asked me three times but each time I said no because I just didn't think I could do it. I knew I could do AP Spanish, but not AP English. The fourth time she asked my Dad in front of me. She explained that it could help me get into college. And so after talking to her my dad didn't tell me you have to do this, he just said it would be good if you did it.

When teachers are unfamiliar with AP courses and their potential for college readiness, they are less likely to recognize student potential and encourage students to enroll in AP courses. Richard Ramirez noted that "not all the teachers know about AP. My teachers in regular classes didn't really talk about AP.

From this discussion, participants identified the teachers' role as that of identification of student potential and primary source of information related to AP courses. While participants stated that most teachers generally communicated information about AP to all students, what made the difference in the participants' decision to enroll in AP was that their teachers quickly identified their potential and connected them to the enrollment process. Several participants in this study indicated that although they had not planned on enrolling in AP classes, their teachers' efforts in communicating the importance and benefits of AP and their support and guidance made the difference in their eventual decision to take such courses.

Administrators

In this study, administrators were found to have a lesser role in the enrollment of students in AP courses. Counselors were identified as part of school administration and considered to be more involved with paperwork than in providing information about AP

courses and stressing the importance and connection to college entrance and success. Moreover, participants commented that school administration stressed the importance of AP courses and college preparation but did not provide clarity on the enrollment process. Despite the lack of specificity for the enrollment process, participants commented that since other students somehow knew how to get into AP courses, the perception that these courses were for select students was perpetuated. Although the role of school administration was not significant, participants suggested that administrators (including counselors) make an effort to focus more on sharing information on AP courses and communicating the importance in college enrollment and success. Additionally, participants also suggested that administration take the time to identify students that have potential for college and have individual conversations about considering AP courses and plan for college.

In supporting the idea that administrators had a limited role in the enrollment of Latino students in AP courses, Hector Robles stated:

Administration is not critical in students entering AP classes. They usually just focus on the ‘bad’ kids. So if you’re ok, they don’t worry about you. They just figure that if you’re a good student, then they don’t need to worry about you that you already have motivation for college.

Edward Mata stated:

I’m not sure if administrators have -- well, from my perspective, I actually didn’t see most of them, or because I haven’t really got in trouble. They only pushed the benefits of just doing well in school.

Joe Hernandez described more in detail how administrators fail to communicate the importance and benefits to AP enrollment. He stated:

Most of what they (administrators) do is discipline. They don't really have a role in AP enrollment. In an ideal setting, principals should have teachers have an overview of which Latino students have potential to further themselves.

Administrators can use teachers as a bridge because of course they are very busy with their imaginary schedule or whatever they do and they can't connect with students. I think that they should use teacher representatives to connect to the students in the classroom setting. By picking out the select students, then they connect to these students and offer not force enrollment in AP courses.

In describing the counselors' role as part of administration, participant Joe Hernandez stated:

Paperwork, your schedule just the very basics is the role of counselors. They've rooted it down to the most necessary things. I guess counselors are so swamped with work they don't really have time to connect to kids anymore. I don't know. Maybe it's just different in high school as it was in elementary.

More significantly, in discussing the school's role in AP course enrollment, Jennifer Lopez stated that:

Schools need to do more to reach out to students even in regular classes. They need to encourage more collaborative work on things they feel would apply to AP and how AP would benefit more than just getting into college. Most have the mindset not to go to college, kids already know they're not going so what's the

point in taking AP classes. AP needs to be beneficial beyond college and schools can demonstrate the relevance to students' future.

Summary

The results of this study demonstrate that there are factors that influence Latino students to enroll or not enroll in advanced placement courses. The questions used to identify such factors included asking a group of Latino high school students in an urban high school to discuss (1) their perceptions of AP courses, (2) factors that contributed to their decision to enroll or not enroll in AP courses, and (3) the role of parents, teachers, and administrators in their enrollment in AP courses.

The participants in this study identified several common perceptions of AP courses including AP courses as (1) a gateway to college, (2) elite, and (3) a pathway to success. Within these stated perceptions, results from this study also pointed to AP courses considered to be (1) more challenging, (2) important in emphasizing study skills for college, and (3) an opportunity to earn college credit while enrolled in high school. While participants in this study shared common perceptions about AP courses, the most significant perception was that AP courses are considered to be important in a college bound trajectory. Most importantly, participants indicated that the perception of AP courses as more challenging and preparation for college, they were more likely to enroll and succeed in college. Additionally, by earning college credit in high school, participants perceived that they would be more likely to be accepted into college and able to afford the cost of college tuition by taking courses at the high school offered at no cost.

In their decision to enroll in AP courses, participants credited (1) teachers, (2) the structure and expectations of AP courses, and (3) enrollment in AP support programs such as AVID and pre-AP. In their decision to not enroll in AP courses, participants cited (1) limited information about AP courses and (2) an absence of advocacy for student enrollment.

In identifying the role of parents, teachers, and administrators in the decision to enroll or not enroll in AP courses, participants cited the role of teachers as the most important factor in their decision. Teachers served as a primary resource in communicating general information about AP courses and motivating students to consider enrolling in such courses. While participants credited their parents for supporting them and encouraging them in school, participants noted that their parents had limited information and understanding of AP courses. Participants cited that since their parents had a limited perspective of AP courses, parents did not encourage or demand that their children take such courses. Participants noted however that their parents were supportive of them enrolling in AP courses especially after teachers stressed that AP courses could help with getting into college. Consequently, the role of parents according to the participants in this study was that of support and encouragement. Participants cited that administrators had the least amount of influence on whether or not to enroll in AP classes. Most significantly, counselors were perceived as part of school administration and considered to be more involved with paperwork than in providing information about AP courses and stressing the importance and connection to college entrance and success. Consequently, by administration clearly emphasizing or encouraging enrollment in AP

courses, participants noted that the perception of AP courses as elite and intended for select students in perpetuated and thus a key factor in hindering enrollment. Although school administration had the least significant role in the enrollment of Latino students in AP courses, it was suggested that administrators (including counselors) make an effort to focus more on sharing information on AP courses and communicating the importance in college enrollment and success. Additionally, participants also suggested that administration take the time to identify students that have potential for college and have individual conversations about considering AP courses and plan for college.

In essence, based on the data collected from this study, there are findings that support and define how Latino students consider high school AP courses. Additionally, from these findings, several themes emerged that best identify and describe factors that affect Latino enrollment and engagement in high school Advanced Placement courses. These include:

Connection and access to college

1. Latino students consider that by enrolling in and successfully completing high school AP courses, they are more likely to gain access to college and successfully complete college courses.
2. High school AP courses are considered to be more rigorous and challenging than regular courses and place an emphasis on college readiness. As such, Latino students are more likely to consider enrolling these courses.

3. Earning college credit is an important consideration for Latino students when deciding to enroll or not enroll in high school AP courses. Earning college credit while in high school is considered more affordable in relation to college tuition costs and an advantage for gaining access to college.

Roles of instructional staff

1. Teachers are the most critical factor for Latino students that decide to enroll in high school AP courses. Teachers communicate information about high school AP courses to students and encourage students that are interested in attending college to enroll in such courses.
2. Teachers that are knowledgeable about AP and college entrance requirements are able to explain how the requirements and expectations in high school AP courses can benefit students that are considering college.
3. As teachers recognize student potential for college and success, they are persistent in encouraging them to consider enrolling in AP courses and are able to connect Latino students to school counselors and administrators to ensure that they enroll in the appropriate courses.
4. School administrators and counselors stress the importance of college and encourage students to prepare for and attend college. However, administrators and counselors do not communicate a clear process for enrolling in high school AP courses.

5. Administrators and counselors have a lesser role in influencing Latino students to enroll in high school AP courses.

Information access

1. General information about high school AP courses is limited and not readily found by Latino students. Latino students identified that while they are interested in enrolling in high school AP courses, they do not know how to enroll in courses and which courses they should enroll in.
2. Parents of Latino students are generally not informed about high school AP courses and how these courses potentially affect and influence college access and success. Parents of Latino students are more likely to encourage their children to enroll in high school AP courses if they understood the critical connection and benefit to college and success.
3. During the registration process, little emphasis is placed on enrolling in high school AP courses. Students that are identified as “AP students” are given consideration as to which AP courses to take. Students not identified as “AP students” are provided with general course offerings.

Curriculum Integrations

1. The pre-AP courses offered in middle school and high school provide a foundational learning experience that supports AP enrollment. Unlike regular course, pre-AP courses require that students engage in rigorous

and challenging work including group projects, student led discussion, and extensive reading and writing assignments.

2. High school AP courses are more rigorous and demand extensive reading, writing, and student collaboration. Pre-AP courses emphasize these standards and are intended to support students in their academic development so that they are more likely to succeed in AP courses.
3. Enrollment in AP courses is largely dependent on teacher recommendations which are at times based on participation in pre-AP courses. As such, Latino students that are not enrolled in pre-AP courses are less likely to be recommended for AP courses.
4. Latino students that are fluent in Spanish are encouraged to enroll in AP Spanish. Through this course, students engage in rigorous activities that define the standard of expectation for AP courses.
5. Middle school Spanish AP courses provide Latino students with a positive and successful experience with AP courses that motivates and encourages continued enrollment in high school AP courses.

Structural support

1. Student advocacy and mentorship to promote and support enrollment in high school AP courses is not readily available to students. Although teachers serve an important role in communicating information and connecting students to administration for support in enrolling in AP courses, they do not connect every student. Instead only those students

that teachers recognize as demonstrating college potential are advocated and supported.

2. The scheduling of students in high school AP courses is largely dependent on teacher recommendations of students that are in gifted and talented programs and pre-AP courses. Latino students that are not identified as GT students or not enrolled in pre-AP courses are less likely to be recommended for AP courses.
3. Latino students that are in bilingual or ESL programs are less likely to be recommended for GT programs and pre-AP programs. Since enrollment in AP courses is largely dependent on teacher recommendation, enrollment will likely be affected.
4. There is an effort to promote college readiness and a college-going culture in high school. However, this promotion is not supported by a clear process of how Latino students can participate in this culture. Without a clear process, the promotion of this culture is limited to few students.

In the next chapter, Chapter V, the findings of this study will be further reviewed and discussed in the context of drawing conclusions that may serve to inform current policy and practice for AP course enrollment in high schools. Recommendations for increasing and supporting the enrollment of Latino students in advanced placement courses in high schools are also discussed.

Chapter V

Summary and Discussion

In this final chapter, an overview of this case study and implications for further research will be presented. The statement of the problem, review of methodology, summary of findings, and relevant connections to literature will also be summarized and presented. This chapter concludes with recommendations for informing school practice and further research to improve the enrollment of Latino students in AP courses in high school.

Although high school AP courses promote college level learning centered student collaboration, discussion, and project application that would benefit all students, they are not readily available to all students. Moreover, the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses has been lower than other student groups including Anglo, Asian and African American students (College Board, 2010). Despite policies that focus on equity and equality in the enrollment of students in high school AP courses, there are factors that discourage students from participating in such courses. According to literature enrollment in high school AP courses is greatly influenced by academic grouping, schooling disadvantage, and access to academic programs that affect college readiness for all students. Although AP courses are made available to all students through open enrollment policies, the enrollment of Latino students in these courses remains low.

The rapid growth of the Latino population in schools now exceeds the growth rates of all other groups. Consequently, this population growth has caused educators to consider necessary changes in how Latino students are recruited, admitted, and supported

in their college readiness experiences in high schools (College Board, 2009).

Additionally, opportunities for completing college level coursework prior to high school graduation are crucial to college enrollment and completion for Latino students.

The purpose of this study was to identify factors for promoting or discouraging Latino enrollment in high school AP courses drawn from perceptions and attitudes of students towards advanced placement programs. More importantly, this study was to identify specific factors that influence Latino students' decision to enroll or not enroll in high school AP courses direct from the perspective of Latino students enrolled in AP courses in an urban high school. Identifying the factors that hinder or promote the enrollment of Latino students in AP courses directly from the students themselves, was critical to analyze current practice and inform future strategies for increasing the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses.

Statement of the problem

AP courses are designed to be rigorous and challenging and encourage and promote critical thinking, collaboration, technology applications, and enhance communication skills. Enrollment of Latino students is below that of other non-Anglo and Anglo students. Typically, AP courses are limited in schools primarily due to budget constraints, entrance criteria, and governing district policies. However, students that demonstrate AP and college bound potential are generally recommended for AP courses by their teachers. Students that participate in other programs such as bilingual education or special education, are less likely to enroll in high school AP courses usually as a result of a lack of academic preparedness, recommendation, or not being enrolled in programs

that support AP preparedness. While there are policies that focus on equity and equality in AP courses, there are factors that hinder or limit student enrollment in such courses. A student's decision to enroll in high school AP courses is dependent on external variables such as student advocacy, local budgets, education policy, social and cultural rules, and school organization.

Advanced placement courses are considered to be a limited resource demanded by various interest groups including parents, teachers, students, and business. Under pressure from various groups, the school system, as a bureaucratic organization and polity, must decide upon a means for developing and adopting policy that will govern entrance requirements, funding, and resources for advanced placement courses in local schools. Since schools differ in organizational structure and culture, policies surrounding AP programs in schools will have varying methods of control. Further, since these local policies are not intended or required to include all students, AP programs in public schools may lead to a form of segregation which limits student academic opportunities in the public school system and ultimately, college and career choices for future generations (Meier, 1991).

Despite research that implicates AP programs as a means of re-segregating students (Valencia, 1991), these programs are still supported and remain an integral part of our educational system. Since not all students enroll in AP courses in consistent rates, the policy and practice of advanced placement programs are criticized as a form of tracking or ability grouping that may largely determine which children will benefit from

access to these programs (Meier, 1991). The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do Latino students perceive Advanced Placement courses?
2. What do Latino students identify as factors that have contributed to their decision to enroll or not enroll in AP courses?
3. What is the role of parents, teachers, and administrators in the enrollment of Latino students in AP courses?

Review of Methodology

A research design based on qualitative methodology and qualitative case study methods was selected for this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998). Moreover, a naturalistic inquiry approach to this research involved employing a constructivist paradigm in evaluating and interpreting data collected through this case study. This case study involved identifying an urban high school with a significant number of Latino students that offered AP courses. Data collected from this study was inductively coded and categorized to describe and interpret relevant data to infer implications of policy and practice affecting the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses.

This qualitative case study was intended to provide rich, descriptive data drawn from student experiences and perceptions from individual interviews that allowed for flexibility and opportunities for further exploration of topics or ideas that emerged from the research. In this study, it was important to understand the individual perspectives of the students to best identify the factors that influence enrollment in advanced placement

courses. As such, a naturalistic inquiry approach involving a constructivist paradigm for evaluating and interpreting data was applied throughout this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, the researcher was the key instrument in collecting and analyzing the interview data, so as to process and clarify the collected data and make adjustments quickly throughout the study. This approach allowed for participants to be more candid and open with sharing their perceptions and perspectives about advanced placement courses and factors that affect Latino enrollment in advanced placement courses in high schools.

The data collected for this study was drawn from individual interviews with students from an urban high school. There were ten interviews with Latino students in grades 10-12 enrolled in AP classes in one high school from one urban school district. Interviews were conducted solely with students so that data collected was drawn directly from student perspectives and experiences with AP courses in their high school. The data presented from this study are from direct quotes made by students during their scheduled interviews. Pseudonyms were used to protect confidentiality of participants.

Summary of Findings

In this section, the findings from the interviews conducted will be presented for each of the guiding research questions followed by an analysis of findings that connect to literature and identify the factors that ultimately affect Latino enrollment in advanced placement courses in high school. Recommendations for informing policy and practice that affect the enrollment of Latino students in AP courses and further research will also be presented.

How do Latino students perceive AP courses?

Latino students identified AP courses as a critical path to gain entrance into college as these courses are credited with preparing students for the rigors and challenges of college courses. Additionally, Latino students considered that the enrollment and completion of AP courses in high school are a critical factor in college acceptance. Latino students also considered that AP courses are courses thought to be exclusive and for select students and not available to all students. Further, since AP courses promote college readiness, Latino students identified these courses as necessary and beneficial for a college trajectory and future career choices and success.

In addition to AP courses considered to be an important factor in gaining college access, Latino students also identified that AP courses promote and emphasize more challenging and rigorous work that support college readiness. Latino students attributed their college readiness to the academic structure and expectations found in AP courses as opposed to general classes. Latino students described that the type of work expected in AP courses such as projects, discussion, collaboration, and writing were important in their success with current and future college level coursework. Additionally, Latino students attributed AP courses to their learned study skills and habits such as note-taking, critical reading, participation and discussion in study groups, commitment to writing, and self-monitoring. Latino students considered that such skills to be an important component in their preparation for and success in college. Further, Latino students considered that the academic expectations and type of work presented in general classes would not prepare them adequately for college level coursework. Consequently, Latino

students correlated that by enrolling in AP courses while in high school, they would be better prepared for college entrance and successfully completing college coursework.

Latino students also related earning college credit while in high school with enrollment in AP courses. By earning college credit in high school at no cost, Latino students considered that they would be more likely to be accepted into college and thus able to afford the cost of college tuition. Considering college acceptance as competitive, Latino students also determined that they would be more likely to be accepted into college if they took AP courses and met AP exam standards for college credit while in high school.

In essence, Latino students identified AP courses to be more challenging than general classes and required that be committed to meeting the expectations and demands of the college level coursework outlined in these courses. Latino students cited that the college focus AP courses provided, would better prepare them to enter and succeed in college. Additionally, by taking AP courses and taking the AP exams successfully, they referenced earning college credit while in high school would provide them with an advantage in gaining access to college as opposed to their counterparts not enrolled in AP courses. Thus, since AP courses are viewed as more challenging and emphasize college readiness, Latino students attribute high school AP courses as an important gateway into college.

What do Latino students identify as factors that have contributed to their decision to enroll or not enroll in AP courses?

In their decision to enroll in high school AP courses, Latino students referenced several factors including the encouragement and support of teachers, expectations and AP course framework, and experience with pre-AP classes that served as requisites for high school AP courses.

Although friends, counselors, and parents have some level of influence, Latino students credited teachers as the most critical factor in their decision to enroll in high school AP courses. Latino students noted that teachers were critical in their learning about AP courses and understanding the requirements and expectations for such courses. Additionally, teachers recognized student potential and intentionally encouraged Latino students to consider the benefits of enrolling AP courses including college preparedness, earning college credit, and gaining access to college. Despite understanding the connection between AP courses and college readiness and entrance, Latino students commented that they had not given real consideration to enrolling AP courses. However, as a result of teachers' persistence in student enrollment in AP courses along with their support and encouragement, Latino students indicated that they were willing to give serious consideration to enrolling in high school AP courses.

The expectations and framework of high school AP courses were also an important factor in the Latino students' decision to enroll. Having identified the need to engage in more challenging work to better prepare for college, Latino students recognized that the expectations and structure of general classes would not meet their

needs. Latino students described general courses as misaligned from college readiness standards. Moreover, according to Latino students general courses emphasize standardize testing, meeting minimum expectations, and discipline as primary learning goals. Instead, Latino students preferred a more rigorous course that promoted college level work, project based learning, collaboration, self-study, relevant learning topics, and the application of technology.

Latino students also identified enrollment in pre-AP classes in middle and high school as important factors in their decision to enroll in high school AP courses. Although Latino students had not been recommended for pre-AP courses, teachers were instrumental in their enrollment in pre-AP classes. Latino students described their experience in pre-AP courses as foundational for high school AP courses. The expectations and course framework in pre-AP classes such as participating in group projects, producing extensive written work, and completing rigorous reading assignments were identified as similar to those found in high school AP courses.

Latino students fluent in Spanish were encouraged to enroll in AP Spanish classes as early as their 8th grade year and added that their level of fluency in Spanish prior to enrolling in AP Spanish served as a contributing factor in their decision to enroll in the course. This experience was referenced as an important factor in Latino students enrolling high school AP courses. The enrollment of Latino students in AP Spanish courses while in middle school was beneficial and greatly influenced how Latino students gave consideration to enrolling in high school AP courses. The AP Spanish course provided students with an opportunity to experience meeting the demands of college level

work successfully. By building on the students' fluency in Spanish, Latino students were motivated to pursue additional high school AP courses. Latino students noted that while enrolled in AP Spanish, they were expected to engage in more challenging work that involved numerous individual and group projects, study sessions on Saturdays, and take the AP exam. As a result of these experiences, Latino students cited that by taking AP Spanish in middle school, they were better prepared and motivated to take additional AP courses in high school.

In their decision to not enroll in AP courses, Latino students determined that the information surrounding AP courses and the enrollment process was very limited and there was a lack of student advocacy for identifying potential AP students. Latino students pointed out that information related to high school AP course offerings and learning objectives was consistently communicated by teachers. However, the information was at best general and vague. Most importantly, the information provided did not specify or communicate a process for enrolling in high school AP courses. Further without a clearly articulated process, Latino students identified that high school AP courses were intended for other students including those already enrolled in AP courses. Thus, Latino students considered that AP courses were not intended for their consideration.

Additionally, Latino students identified that advocacy for AP enrollment was limited and largely dependent on teachers recognizing individual student potential and preparedness for AP courses and college readiness. Without such advocates, Latino students were less likely to consider enrolling in high school AP courses. Despite an

interest in enrolling in high school AP courses to best prepare for college and/or earn college credit, Latino students cited that the lack of intentional advocacy resulted in them not actively seeking enrollment in AP courses. Further, Latino students identified that teachers ultimately served an important role in influencing their decision to enroll in AP courses. However, Latino students also determined that had their academic potential for college level coursework not been recognized by a teacher, they would not have considered enrolling in high school AP courses. Thus, by largely depending on teacher identification and recommendation, the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses is random and unintentional.

In summary, Latino students have a determined interest in high school AP courses. Latino students attribute college readiness and entrance to high school AP courses largely due to demand and expectations outlined in such courses. Further, Latino students recognize that the general courses offered at high school will not provide the challenge, rigor, and relevancy they need to gain access to college and complete college coursework successfully. Additionally, Latino students that have experience in AP requisites such as pre-AP and AP Spanish are more likely to continue their enrollment in high school AP courses. More importantly, Latino students that referenced entering AP Spanish in middle school as a result of their Spanish language proficiency, are more likely to continue taking AP Spanish courses. Moreover, these students gain invaluable experience with college level courses and thus, gain the confidence to pursue additional high school AP courses. Therefore Latino students would consider enrolling in high school AP courses. Regardless of their level of interest in high school AP courses,

information about which courses to take and the enrollment process is limited and not readily available. Despite these factors, Latino students reference teachers as the most critical factor in their decision to enroll in high school AP courses. Teachers serve as a primary resource for identifying student academic potential, promoting AP courses, and offering guidance and support to students that motivate students to pursue college level coursework. Thus, teachers are instrumental in Latino students enrolling in high school AP courses.

What is the role of parents, teachers, and administrators in the enrollment of Latino students in AP courses?

Parents' role in the enrollment of high school AP courses is that of encouragement and support. Latino students indicated that their parents had a limited understanding of AP courses and implications for college readiness, entrance, and success. Their understanding of high school AP courses aligns with Latino students reporting that information about these courses is very limited and vague. As a result, Latino students determined that without clear, explicit information about high school AP courses, their parents had less than a general understanding the connection to college. Latino students noted that their parents wanted the best educational experience for them and did have expectations that their children would pursue and attend college successfully. Moreover, Latino students reported that their parents trusted that they were in the best courses offered in their school, even if the courses they were taking were general classes.

Latino students considered that limited information and understanding of high school AP courses and college requisites constrained and affected their parents' role in

advocating their enrollment in AP classes. More importantly, with this limited perspective of AP courses, parents did not encourage nor demand that their children take such courses. Consequently, the role of Latino parents is mainly that of support and encouragement.

Teachers were considered as the most important factor in Latino students' decision to enroll in high school AP courses. Latino students identified that the teachers who took a special interest in them and encouraged them to take more challenging courses such as AP, made the difference in their decision to enroll in high school AP courses. Latino students also stated that teachers recognized their performance and work ethic as important reasons for suggesting that they enroll in AP courses. More importantly, Latino students determined that if teachers do not recognize their academic potential, they are less likely to consider enrolling in high school AP courses. Further, since identification and recommendation of potential high school AP students is largely dependent on teachers, the consideration that high school AP courses are for select students is perpetuated and realized. Consequently, if teachers are unfamiliar with the importance and benefit of AP courses for students or do not identify student potential, enrollment in such courses is hindered.

While they had not initially considered or planned enrolling in high school AP courses, Latino students credited their teachers' diligent and intentional efforts in communicating the importance and benefits of taking AP courses which made the difference in their decision to enroll in high school AP courses.

The administrator role was found to not be significant in the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses. Counselors were also identified as part of school administration and considered to be more involved with paperwork than in providing students with relevant information about AP courses and stressing the importance and connection to college entrance and success. Moreover, Latino students commented that school administration stressed the importance of AP courses and college preparation but did not provide clarity on the enrollment process nor the benefits of enrolling in and successfully completing high school AP courses. Despite the lack of specificity for the enrollment process, participants commented that since other students somehow knew how to get into AP courses, the perception that these courses were for select students was perpetuated. Although the role of school administration was not significant, participants suggested that administrators (including counselors) make an effort to focus more on sharing information on AP courses and communicating the importance in college enrollment and success. Additionally, participants also suggested that administration take the time to identify students that have potential for college and have individual conversations about considering AP courses and plan for college.

Connections to literature

College access and success

Although Advanced Placement programs are promoted and supported, there are significant gaps in participation for Latino students. Adding to this challenge is the significant growth of Latino student enrollment in schools (Eschbach, 2009). Of the 1

million Latino students eligible to enroll in high school advanced placement courses, only nineteen percent were enrolled in advanced or dual enrollment/college credit courses. Considering that the advanced placement program was developed with the intention of preparing able students for college before graduating from high school (College Board, 1994) and Latino enrollment in AP courses is low, Latino students are less likely to gain college access or successfully complete college coursework.

The data collected from this study suggest that enrollment and access to high school AP courses are critical to college access and success for Latino students. To support college readiness and access for Latino students there is an intentional push to promote “more Advanced Placement courses in our high schools” (Wagner, p.6). Moreover, AP courses are designed to promote college readiness, and must be made available for all students and not just for those students identified as college bound (Wagner, 2008). Advanced Placement program provides students with learning experiences that are specialized and academically challenging for students (Bleske-Rechek, Lubinski, and Benbow , 2004).

Latino students identified that high school AP courses are more challenging than general classes and require a full commitment to meeting the expectations and academic demands of the college level coursework outlined in these courses. By accessing such courses in high school and fulfilling the requirements of AP courses successfully, Latino students recognize that they will be prepared for college coursework and as a result succeed in college (Goldrick-Rab and Mazzeo, 2005). Thus, Latino students recognize that they are an advantage for college acceptance if they successfully complete AP course

requirements including the AP course exams to earn college credit while in high school (Casserly, 1986). Consequently, Latino students enrolled in high school AP courses are at a greater advantage than their counterparts not enrolled in high school AP courses and are more likely to earn an undergraduate college degree and also pursue graduate studies (Bleske-Rechek, Lubinski, Benbow, p.219). Essentially, advanced placement courses provide the enhanced learning experiences that promote college attendance, earning college credit, and in essence an education that is the key to college access and success (Holland & Hinton, 2009; Jodry et al, 2004).

Academic Accessibility

In an effort to promote equity and access in AP for students, AP support programs such as pre-AP are offered to students. For Latino students who are underrepresented in high school AP courses, pre-AP courses are more likely to serve as a foundational experience that encourage participation in AP courses in high school (Dougherty & Mellor, 2010). Additionally, enrollment in AP Spanish courses while in middle school provided students with the motivation to pursue other AP courses in high school. For Latino students enrolled in AP Spanish, they were provided an opportunity to engage in more challenging work that involved numerous individual and group projects, study sessions on Saturdays, and successfully taking the AP exam. By building on their strengths such as Spanish fluency and literacy coupled with their successful completion of AP Spanish, Latino students are more likely to enroll in additional high school AP courses.

However, despite the benefits connected to increasing AP enrollment as a result of pre-AP enrollment, Latino students are still underrepresented. Pre-AP courses referenced as honors or GT classes typically require teacher recommendation and approval. As a result, students enrolled in these AP support classes are limited to a few select students which are most often identified through gifted and talented programs. Moreover, because of such limitations, Latino students are less likely to be enrolled in pre-AP courses as a result of schooling disadvantage (Yun and Moreno, 2006) and second-generation discrimination (Meier & Stewart , 1991).

Yun and Moreno (2006) use the term schooling disadvantage to articulate how enrollment of Latino students in schools misaligned with school demographic data citing schools with a majority of African American and Latino students “had lower college eligibility and participation rates, fewer advanced placement (AP) courses, and fewer experienced teachers, than did students from White-majority schools” (p.12).

Meier and Stewart’s discussion on second generation discrimination describes how Latino students have “remained highly segregated” and “consistently underrepresented in classes for gifted students” based on language (p.79). Meier and Stewart (1991) posit that students who are English Language Learners are less likely to be considered for gifted programs. As a result, the teacher’s assessment and advocacy of student academic ability can serve to either promote or hinder student enrollment in advanced academic programs such as gifted and talented, college preparatory, or Advanced Placement courses. Meier and Stewart identify political representation, as critical to student enrollment in advanced academics since teachers serve such an integral

part in evaluating students' ability and potential. Consequently, Latino students enrolled in bilingual programs are less likely to be recommended for gifted programs and essentially not enrolled in AP support programs, such as pre-AP, nor in high school AP courses. Moreover, AP courses become a source of "second generation discrimination" as described by Meier and Stewart. Thus, access to "the best education available" will remain limited for Latino students (Meier and Stewart, p. 167).

Latino students noted that while they had not originally been recommended for pre-AP courses, teachers quickly recognized their potential and encouraged them to speak to counselors about enrollment. Other participants identifying Spanish as their first language attributed their enrollment in middle school AP Spanish as a key factor in their enrollment in additional AP courses. Without teacher advocacy and support such as this, Latino students are less likely to be considered for AP support programs such as pre-AP which have further implications on enrollment in high school AP courses. Thus, teacher advocacy and support is critical and necessary.

Advocacy and support

Despite efforts to increase AP course offerings and communicate the importance in college entrance and success to increase AP enrollment for Latinos, rates remain low (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). However, Latino students reported that their decision to enroll in high school AP courses was largely due to the encouragement and support of teachers (Holland & Hinton, 2009; Jodry et al, 2004). Latino students also reported that teachers were their primary resource in learning about AP courses and understanding the requirements and expectations for such courses. Admittedly, Latino students indicated

that they had not considered enrolling in high school AP courses but that their teachers' persistence and encouragement for them to enroll made the difference. The connection made with Latino students provided teachers with the ability to recognize student potential and encourage their students with success to consider the benefits of enrolling AP courses including college preparedness, earning college credit, and gaining access to college (Holland & Hinton, 2009; Jodry et al, 2004).

Latino students identified that advocacy is needed to support and encourage them to enroll in high school AP courses. Holland and Hinton (2009) also report that advocacy is critical especially for students that have been consistently underrepresented in advanced academics such as Latino students. Advocacy is important to support and best communicate necessary preparations for successful participation in high school AP courses. Moreover, non-Anglo students, including Latino students, are less likely to be enrolled in college level tracks and to have a working relationship with school personnel that could advocate their participation and enrollment (Holland and Hinton, 2009). Also, Holland and Hinton (2009) suggest a support system for students that "fosters personalized relationships between students and staff so that frequent communication, academic norms, and the sharing of valuable resources exist" (p.26). Holland and Hinton (200) contend that with this type of support system, teachers can connect with other staff members to monitor and advocate student progress and success towards college preparedness. Additionally, students will have access to teachers and staff members that care about them and connect with them. Thus Latino students are more likely to better prepare for college by enrolling in high school AP courses (Holland & Hinton, 2004).

In essence, there are numerous efforts to increase AP enrollment for Latino students by raising the awareness of AP courses and promoting AP support programs such as pre-AP. However, advocacy and support for Latino students are identified to be the most significant factors in deciding to enroll in high school AP courses. Through advocacy and support, Latino students are more likely to consider college level coursework. Moreover, when teachers make a focused and intentional effort in connecting high school AP courses with Latino students, they are more likely to consider enrollment. Thus, with a focused and intentional advocacy program that serves to clearly articulate and communicate information about AP courses and enrollment process and continue to support and nurture student interest, Latino enrollment in high school AP courses is more likely to increase.

Recommendations

Using the results from this study there are three important recommendations for educators to consider in their overall effort to increase the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses. Recommendations include (1) clearly communicating information about AP programs, (2) articulating a clear process for enrollment in AP courses, and (3) establishing an advocacy and support program. Recommendations followed by supporting evidence will be presented and discussed.

Clear Communication

Clearly communicating information about high school AP courses to both students and parents is crucial to increasing the enrollment of Latino students in these courses. Latino students clearly understand that high school AP courses are an integral

part in gaining college entrance and successfully completing college courses. The motivation and desire to take advanced coursework is there, however, Latino students do not have clear details on which AP courses to take nor do they have information on prerequisites and deadlines. Latino students reported that the information currently communicated is vague. Further the manner in which information is communicated to students is very general relying on teachers to share with students. To remedy this, it is recommended that administration (including counselors) take a more proactive and individual approach to communicate details about high school AP courses including course overviews, schedules and availability, prerequisites, connections to college courses, credits, career goals, and available support systems (study groups, tutoring, internships). To accomplish this approach to communication, it is recommended that schools consider a marketing campaign approach to inform students and solicit responses. For a more intentional approach it is also recommended that school staffs also make an intentional effort to reach out to students individually for a more personalized approach to communicating the importance of AP to students' individual goals for college and/or career.

In addition to improving communication with students, it is also recommended that schools make a focused and intentional effort to informing parents about the importance of high school AP courses and their connection to college acceptance and success. Latino students identified that while their parents were their primary source of motivation and encouragement for doing their best in school, their parents did not fully understand the implications AP courses have on their children's college trajectory.

According to students, their parents are supportive of their children's education and would be more involved in their children's decision about AP courses if they knew more about the courses. It is recommended that schools make an effort to regularly promote information about high school AP courses to parents using media (brochures, phone calls) and conferences and workshops during times convenient to parents.

In essence, to increase Latino enrollment in high school AP courses, schools must discontinue a blanket approach to communication and adopt a more personalized, specific, and intentional approach that is more informative, relevant, and inclusive.

Clarify enrollment process

Data from this study pointed to the lack of clearly stated procedures for enrolling in high school AP courses influenced Latino students' decision to not enroll in these courses. Latino students do have an interest in pursuing advanced academic courses, but do not know how. Similar to improving communication about high school AP courses, it is recommended that schools clearly articulate the enrollment process and procedures.

An articulated process and procedures for enrollment should be communicated to students well in advance and employ methods similar to communicating general information about AP courses. By communicating a step-by step approach to AP course enrollment, students are more likely to understand and connect course requirements, attain necessary signatures, and develop a focused and intentional plan for AP enrollment and completion.

Establish an advocacy program

Latino students identified that the absence of student advocates and mentors that could encourage enrollment in AP courses was another important factor in their decision not to enroll in high school AP courses. Although Latino students cited that teachers were an important factor in their decision to enroll in AP courses, it was also determined that without advocacy, enrollment in AP courses for students especially Latino students was largely dependent on teacher recommendation and thus unintentional. Further, in this study, Latino students indicated that it was solely up to them to request enrollment into AP courses unless a teacher recognized their potential and suggested enrollment. Further without advocacy, Latino students are more likely to consider that they are not prepared for high school AP courses and choose not to enroll in these courses. It is recommended that schools assign groups of students to mentors whose purpose is to bridge students to counselors and administrators that can facilitate communication about AP courses and the enrollment process. Moreover, it is recommended that the expectations of the counselor's role be restructured to emphasize a more intentional focused approach in guiding and mentoring Latino students in their enrollment in AP courses. In doing so, this model can best support advocacy and mentorship for students in their decision to enroll in high school AP courses.

Despite having an interest in such courses, limited information about the enrollment process for AP courses and few student advocates, Latino students are less likely to consider enrolling in high school AP courses. By taking a more proactive, specific, and intentional approach to communicating AP course information and engaging

students in the enrollment process, schools are more likely to increase the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses.

Further research

The findings in this study were based on interviews with Latino students in one urban high school intended to identify factors that influence the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses. In this study, participants cited that teacher recommendations and support were important determinants in their decision to enroll in high school AP courses. However, Latino students also noted that they had the motivation and interest in advanced level coursework as early as their elementary and middle school years. While in middle school, Latino students recognized that there was a difference in educational programs between general education classes and pre-AP classes. Further, students enrolled in pre-AP courses identified that their experience in these classes also helped support and influence their decision to pursue enrollment in high school AP courses. Since enrollment in such courses served as a contributing factor to continuing enrollment in AP courses in high schools, further research could include identifying factors that influence enrollment in pre-AP courses at the middle school level from the perspective of Latino students.

Conclusion

Education has long been the cornerstone to the American dream and personal success. Earning an education is the key to success. With an education, college, career, and economic freedom can become a reality. However, in most recent years, it has become apparent that having the *right* education is most important in realizing college,

career, and economic freedom. In an extremely competitive global economy, now more than ever, it is important that we ensure the *right* education for all students. However, with college enrollment and college completion rates at a low for Latino students, it is apparent that not all students are receiving the right education they need to compete for college and career. Moreover, while the numbers of Latino students in schools outnumber their counterparts, enrollment rates in high school AP courses are low as compared to other groups. Thus if Latino students are to receive the right education to successfully prepare for college entry and course completion, it was critical to inform current policy and practice so that Latino enrollment in high school AP courses is increased and in essence access to college and career choice is realized. As such, high schools must also make changes to afford students, especially Latino students, opportunities for college level coursework prior to graduation.

Based on the data collected and emergent themes from this study, there are recommendations that can be taken into consideration by educators and school policy makers to increase the level of enrollment and engagement in Advanced Placement courses. These recommendations are discussed under each emergent theme from this study. Recommendations are as follows:

Connection and access

- Latino students recognize the importance and connection of AP courses to college access and success. As such, schools must continue to emphasize college readiness and support a college-going culture that includes

communicating how high school AP courses specifically support and promote college readiness and access.

- School staffs must communicate the differences in academic learning goals between general education (regular) classes and AP courses to articulate the expected standards for college readiness and success.
- School staffs must articulate how college credit can be earned by successfully completing high school AP courses emphasizing to students and parents the affordability of college tuition expenses by doing so.

Roles of instructional staff

- Schools must provide training opportunities in AP curriculum and strategies for all teachers regardless if they teach AP courses or not. By receiving such training, teachers are more likely to integrate strategies such as project based learning and student led discussion that will encourage and motivate interest in enrolling in AP courses.
- As part of the AP curriculum and strategies training, teachers must also receive professional development on identifying student potential for college and success through a profiling and monitoring system that includes promotion of AP courses and advocacy for connecting students to counselors and administrators for AP enrollment.
- Schools must engage in an inclusive process for identifying students for AP courses and establish individual meetings with students and parents to communicate information about AP courses and establish a high school

and college readiness plan including enrollment and completion of AP courses and exams.

- Strengthen the roles of administrators and counselors to include a more active and proactive approach in enrolling Latino students in AP courses during the registration process. Administrators and counselors should actively review student academic performance prior to registration so that recommendations for AP courses are not solely dependent on teacher recommendations.

Information access

- Schools must articulate a clear process for enrolling in AP courses including meeting with counselors and/or administrators to develop a plan which identifies which courses to take and goals for meeting course requirements and expectations.
- Schools must develop regular workshops and/or informational sessions for parents to best communicate how AP courses support college readiness and access and how they can motivate and support their children in enrolling in AP courses.
- During the registration process, AP course offerings should be made available to all students with comparisons to general classes with articulated expectations and outcomes.

Curriculum Integrations

- Schools must give consideration to increasing opportunities for Latino students to enroll in pre-AP courses which will support academic learning for AP course success regardless of their enrollment in Bilingual or ESL programs.
- Schools must increase the number of pre-AP courses to best promote and support learning and encourage and motivate enrollment in AP courses.
- AP Spanish courses must be promoted and increased in middle schools to best support Latino students who are fluent in Spanish to enroll in AP courses.

Structural support

- Schools must establish a student advocate and mentorship program that supports the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses. An advocacy and mentoring program must connect students to information about AP courses, process for enrollment, and academic support for success in AP courses.
- Identify and recommend AP courses individualized to student graduation plans and college/career trajectory.
- Review course enrollment and progress to identify need for additional support and/or advocacy.
- Schools must develop a partnership with parents to best communicate and articulate AP course goals, expectations, and implications. A partnership can include regular conferences or meetings with parents to review

courses, student progress, and connect relevance to college access and success.

This study allowed for identifying factors that affect AP enrollment directly from the perspective of the Latino students. Results from this study identified several key factors that influence Latino students to enroll or not enroll in advanced placement courses. Latino students are motivated and encouraged to take high school AP courses and most importantly consider that their teachers serve a critical role in their decision to enroll in high school AP courses. However, they are discouraged by limited information about high school AP courses, the enrollment process and advocacy. As a result, schools must change current policy and practice related to communicating information and enrollment process about high school AP courses to both students and parents. Additionally, schools must develop an adequate advocacy and support system that is proactive in early identification and guidance in the enrollment of Latino students in high school AP courses. Lastly, school policy and procedures in offering AP support programs such as pre-AP must be inclusive for all students and encourage an increase in course offerings and enrollment. In improving current policy and practice related to enrolling Latino students in high school AP courses, schools will ultimately afford every student an equal life chance at achieving their own dream for success.

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Vita

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